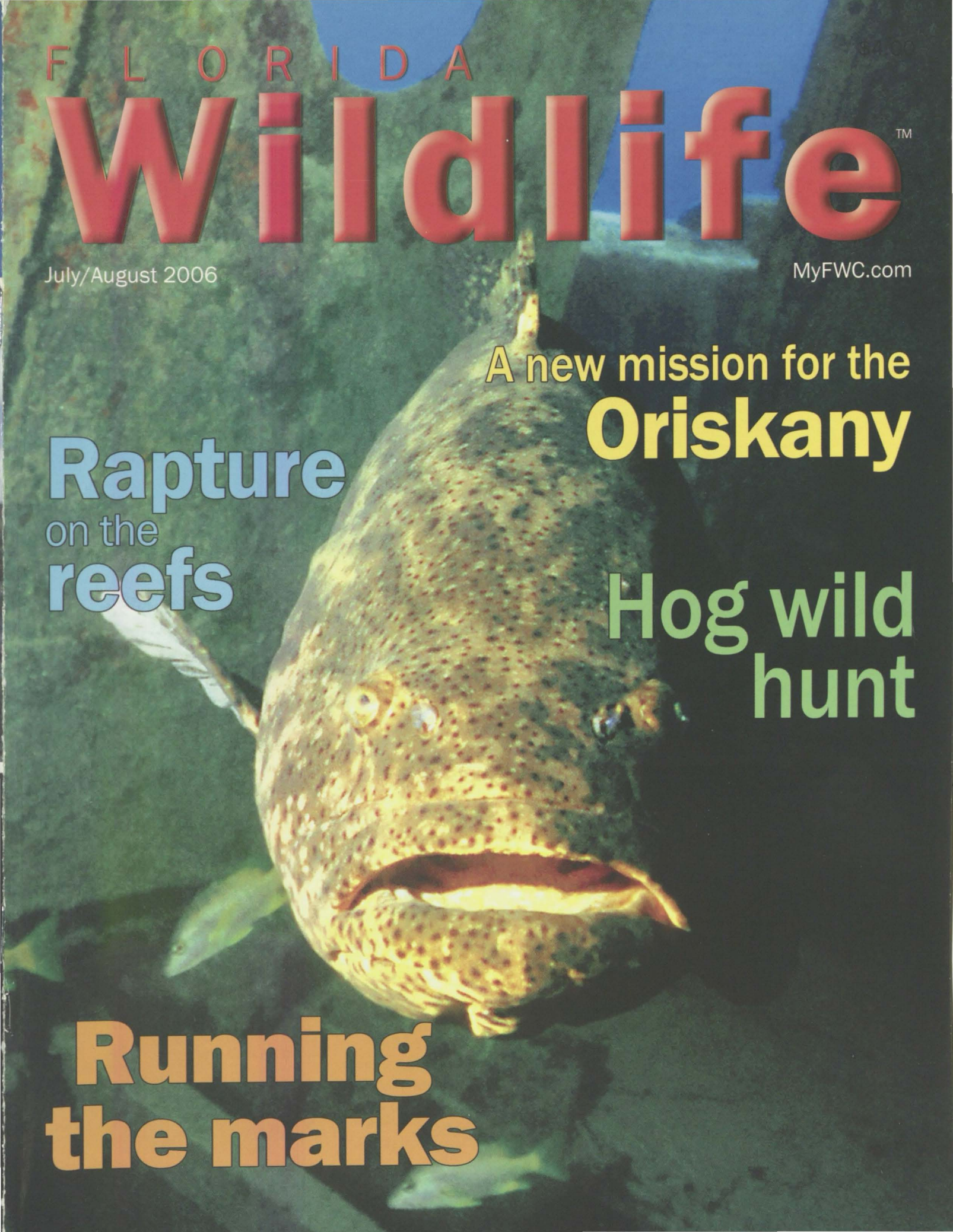

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July/August 2006

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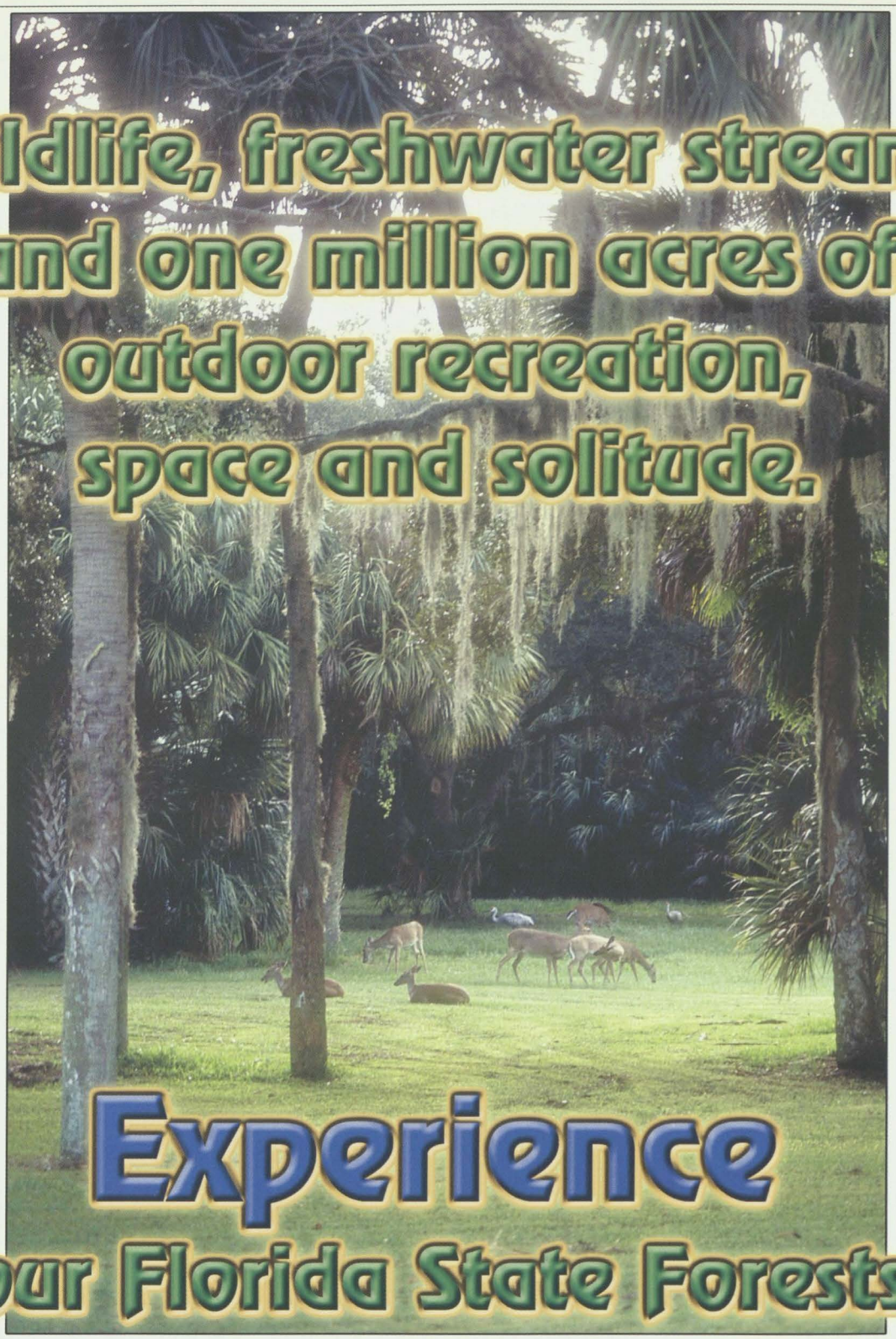
A new mission for the Oriskany

Rapture on the reefs

Hog wild hunt

Running the marks



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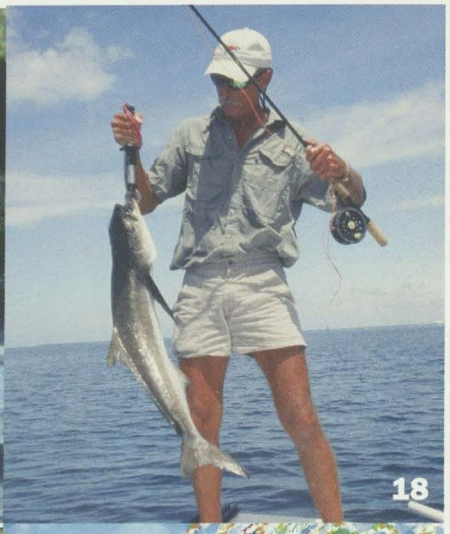
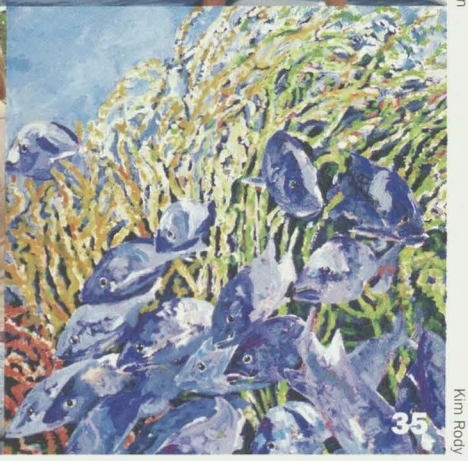
Michael Wisenbaker



Capt. Fred Everson

Dale Burd



Kim Rody

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Volume 59

FLORIDA Wildlife

Issue 4

CELEBRATING OUR HERITAGE OF HUNTING, FISHING AND NATURE-BASED RECREATION

Published by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Our mission: Managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people.

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Taking action . . .

Kenneth D. Haddad

Executive Director
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The impressive thing about Florida is there is room for both humans and wildlife. It just takes careful action to find the right balance.

Florida is home to an astounding array of fish and wildlife and the habitats that support them. With more than 700 animals on land, more than 1,250 freshwater and marine fish, numerous other aquatic and marine vertebrates, and many thousands of insects and other invertebrates, Florida is literally teeming with wildlife.

Florida also is home to more than 17 million people, 1,250 golf courses, 370,000 hotel rooms and a gross economic product of more than $490 billion.

The impressive thing about Florida is there is room for both humans and wildlife. It just takes careful action to find the right balance.

In 2004, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) embarked on an ambitious new effort to conserve all of Florida's wildlife and natural places. Dubbed "Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative," it is our opportunity to create, fund and implement a strategic vision for conserving all of Florida's wildlife, including fish and invertebrates. Merging three decades of previous conservation efforts into a single plan, the initiative is our state's contribution to a wildlife-conservation effort involving all U.S. states and territories. The goal is to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered and to keep common species common.

It began as an alliance of the FWC and environmental and conservation organizations, farmers, hunters, anglers, businesses, other government agencies and individuals, all working together to develop and implement Florida's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

The strategy provides a platform for taking actions to proactively conserve all of Florida's wildlife and the places they live. It addresses conservation issues, management needs and priorities and is a stimulus to engage conservation partners to think about their individual and coordinated roles.

The plan identifies 45 priority habitats and 974 species of greatest conservation need. It explains the reasons why they need help and presents concrete solutions to problems.

Saving endangered species is, and will remain, a priority, but equally important is ensuring that common species remain plentiful.

All U.S. states and territories were required to submit acceptable plans to continue receiving federal dollars for the State Wildlife Grants Program. I'm pleased to report that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has approved Florida's strategy.

We are now moving into the implementation phase. The initiative is a non-regulatory effort designed to create partnerships to implement actions at the local level. Floridians identified more than 1,000 actions in Florida's comprehensive strategy. The goal now is to empower citizens, agencies and organizations to take action. The initiative is committed to building partnerships across the state of Florida with those interested in preventing wildlife and habitat declines. As part of our implementation efforts, more than 70 conservation leaders gathered in Tallahassee May 17 to determine key priorities for action and how best to work as partners to achieve success.

This July, the initiative granted $2.6 million in State Wildlife Grant funding to projects to implement these important conservation measures.

Go to MyFWC.com and click on the Wildlife Legacy link to see how you can be part of this historic effort.

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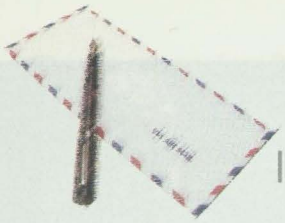


In Box

Article suggestions

Thank you for the January/February issue of *Florida Wildlife* magazine. This certainly is an outstanding way to begin the magazine's publication again. The amount of material covered is what I would normally expect in a quarterly or semi-annual publication!

Suggestions for future articles might include stories about volunteer work days that deal with exotic plant removal, native landscape planting, building of an artificial reef, etc.

Another article might cover citizen grassroots efforts to have a say in how their community will be developed.

Recently, in the town of Ruskin, citizens got together to protect the Little Manatee River and its watershed by working to have two applications for rezoning defeated. This is a good example of how people, without the help of a lawyer, can manage growth in their neighborhood by getting involved in their government.

I appreciate the opportunity to offer feedback to "my" *Florida Wildlife* magazine.

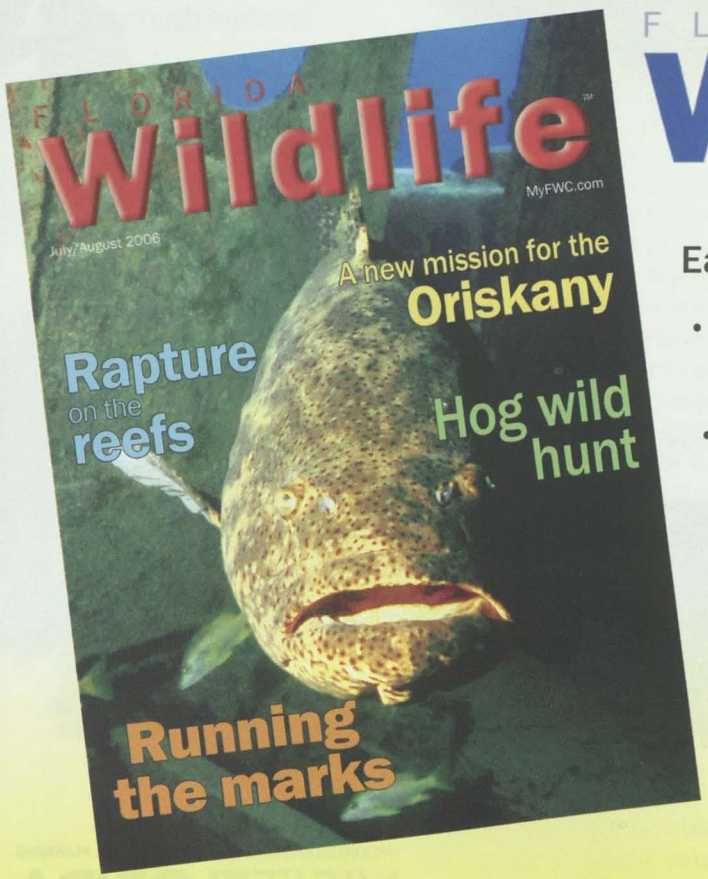
Mike Fite

Correction

The March/April 2006 issue of Florida Wildlife's *"Babes in the Woods" article stated "Touching the animal may cause the mother to reject it because it is contaminated with human scent." This is inaccurate as birds do not have much sense of smell and will not reject a young bird if it has been touched by a human.*

Young animals may be abandonded if humans are too close to the baby and the mother is kept away for an extended length of time.

Remember, it is best not to touch young wild animals, for both the animal's sake and your own. Only intervene if you see the mother animal is injured or dead or if the baby animal is obviously sick, injured, starving or in distress due to weather conditions.



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Rapture on the reefs

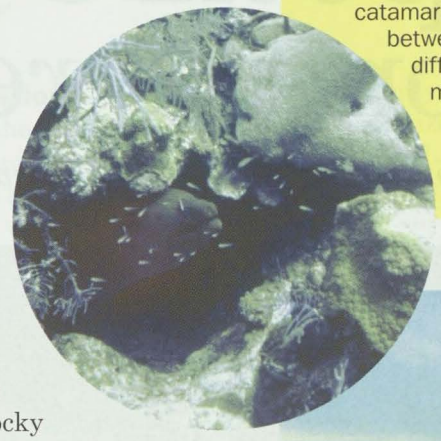
Article and photographs by Michael Wisenbaker

Top left: Elkhorn coral appears in the foreground of this rocky reef scene. **Above:** A school of yellow goatfish cruises past the cracks and crevices pocking a reef among patches of staghorn coral.

On a mild winter's day in 1973, the tepid waters of Molasses Reef in Pennekamp Park enveloped me like a snug glove. Other than being nervous, my first dive on a coral reef was rapturous. Although I'd seen many undersea films, nothing I had ever done before prepared me for the sensations I felt down there.

Coral reefs, the rainforests of the sea, comprise one of earth's most captivating habitats. They usually occur within or near tropical zones along eastern shores of continents where warm, clear currents prevail. Each species of coral critter stakes out its unique niche. These tiny colonial animals fashion stone castles for themselves. Some of their homemade palaces, such as those of endangered elkhorns and staghorns, tower above the seabed and branch out like trees. Others take the form of grooved boulders, such as brain corals, which grow only a fraction of an inch per year.

North America's only true coral reefs lie about six miles off the Florida Keys. They range in depth from about 15 to 45 feet. The first ones appear just south of Miami and stretch for about 150 miles down to the Dry Tortugas – about 70 miles west of Key West. The bank and patch reefs found in Florida hold more than 50 species of coral. Algae, anemones, gorgonians, sea fans, sponges and other organisms anchor themselves to the corals. Lobsters, crabs and shrimp, in turn, seek



Left: A green moray eel sticks its head out of its lair so gobies and wrasses can clean it. This eel later came out and was about five feet long. **Below:** A catamaran and its crew are silhouetted as the sun sets on the Marquesas, between Key West and the Dry Tortugas. **Below right:** Although it's difficult to make out, this coral and gorgonian encrusted object is a massive anchor lost at sea many years ago. Look carefully and you might spot a queen angelfish in the photo. **Right:** A sizeable nurse shark darts through a patchy reef.

out hollows within the reefs. Small fish, mollusks and worms also flock to these rocky reaches for food and safe haven. All told, about 150 species of fish – wearing an amazing array of costumes – flit about in the dappled light that bathes the reefs. Large predators such as barracudas, rays and sharks prowl the reefs searching for meals. Human invaders also come to capture, either on film or for dinner, many denizens of the deep.

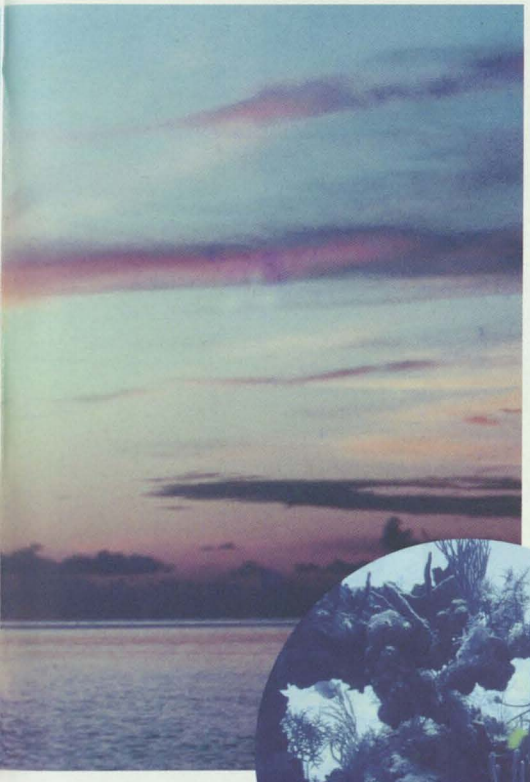
Jacques Cousteau, famed French undersea explorer, wrote a book about the oceans called *The Silent World*. I'm not sure what he meant by "silent," since a din of sounds can be heard on reefs. Parrotfish loudly crunch corals and rocks as they graze for algae. Grunts get their name from the sounds that they emit. Shrimp sound like Rice Krispies popping. When you grab a spiny lobster, it makes a noise that to my ears sounds like "eeek, eeek, eeek."

While inhabitants of reefs often appear in dazzling colors on most films and photos, this gives a false view of how they look as you fin over a reef. Unless you bring your own light, reds, oranges and yellows quickly fade as you sink a few feet below the surface or move sideways from objects. In real life, reef scenes resemble endless vistas of muted blues and grays.

With the myriad of textures you find, it's tempting to reach out and caress things. You should resist doing this for several reasons. Most importantly, corals are highly sensitive and may be damaged by your touch. Also, a coral cut can leave you with a nasty wound that will take an eternity to heal. Beyond that, if you touch "fire coral," you'll quickly learn how it got its name.

Most marine fish also have sharp teeth and may bite if you harass them. I once watched three divers follow a nurse shark into a small coral cave. Although many think nurse sharks are harmless, they will attack when threatened. Even if this large fish had just banged against the divers with its tough hide and massive bulk, it could have left them with painful scrapes and bruises.

On another occasion, I almost choked when a diver making a movie of a giant sting ray hovered right over the top of this marvelous creature – with a wing span of more than 6 feet. Although not aggressive by nature, his actions could have frightened or confused the ray and it might have jabbed the overly-bold cameraman with its barb. Other critters, such as stonefish, come cloaked with



highly venomous dorsal spines and lurk unnoticed on the bottom. Should you accidentally bump into one of them, they could seriously harm, if not kill, you.

On a lighter note, I once tried to grab a lobster with my bare hand. As I did, some concealed critter branded my paw like a red-hot iron. I'm glad it wasn't a moray eel nip, which could have shredded my fingers. As a general rule, don't touch or brush against anything when diving reefs.

Lastly, be extremely cautious where you place your hands, or other body parts. Stay off the bottom. These practices will not only help prevent you from injuring yourself but will serve to keep our reefs healthier.

I got a different perspective of reefs when I worked as a state agent. This job entailed monitoring the salvaging of Spanish galleons sunk by hurricanes on shallow shoals that parallel the Keys. In the 17th and 18th century, many such ships, laden with booty pilfered from the New World, sailed back to Spain. In so doing, they often left Havana and passed over the treacherous reefs along Florida's Keys and Lower East Coast. Ships that foundered on the jagged bottom have left a graveyard of ghost galleons.

I spent much time on an area called the "Bank of Spain." It held plunder from the *Nuestra Senora de Atocha*. The Atocha sank in 1622. Mel Fisher devoted his life to finding and recovering this rich wreck southwest of the Marquesas and about 35 miles from Key West. Big barracuda would hover over our shoulders as we worked the wreck. We also often had to dodge large hunks of coral cut loose by blowers that salvors used to uncover artifacts.

Several years after that, three friends and I set sail in two small boats to snorkel, dive and explore the beads of islands and reefs stretching from Key West to the Marquesas Keys. The Marquesas form a doughnut-shaped isle of 11 keys that wrap around a shallow, emerald-hued harbor. Upon our arrival, we feasted on reef staples of succulent spiny lobster and grouper – harvested fresh from the sea. We also witnessed spectacular sunrises and sunsets as well as the superb maneuvers of magnificent frigate birds.

All these reefs now fall within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Created in 1990, the sanctuary serves to protect these veiled gems.

Sadly, the health of our coral reefs has steadily declined over the past several decades. This decline stems from both man-made and natural events. Actions adversely affecting reefs include hurricanes, cold fronts, overuse (and abuse) by people, heavy sediments and diseases.

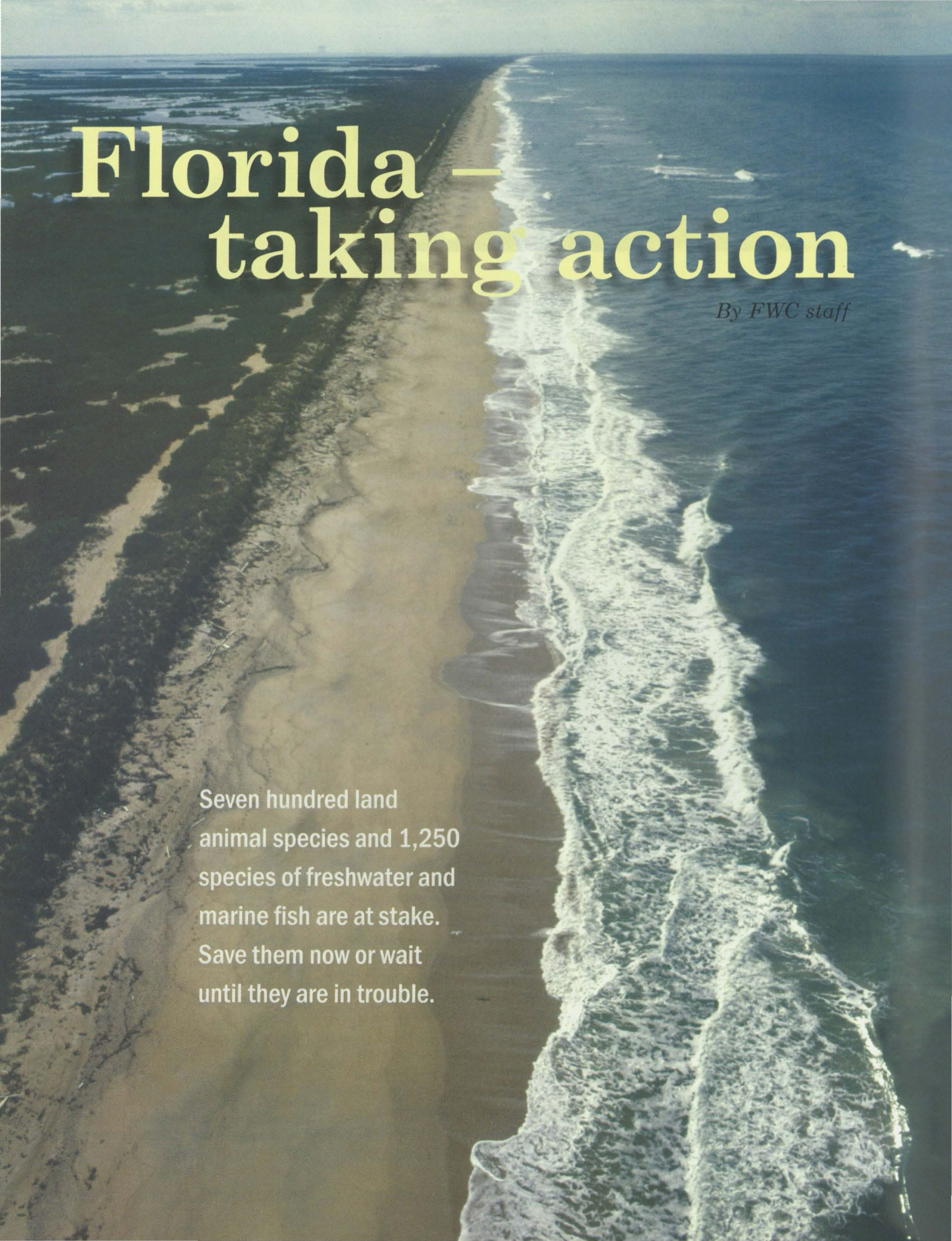
Sanctuary staff study and monitor conditions on the reefs. They also regulate human activities there to protect and maintain the integrity of the coral reefs.

In closing, you don't need to travel to faraway places to explore one of nature's utmost wonders. Coral reefs, shielded by the turquoise waters of the Florida Keys, offer us a truly enchanting place in our own back yard to discover this rapturous realm. FW

Mike Wisenbaker enjoys diving – especially underwater photography – and various kinds of boating and other outdoor pursuits.

Florida – taking action

By FWC staff



Seven hundred land animal species and 1,250 species of freshwater and marine fish are at stake. Save them now or wait until they are in trouble.

Saving all of Florida's native species is the challenge facing the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). The FWC will move now – before the challenge grows more complicated.

The Florida Wildlife Legacy Initiative (FWLI) is the FWC's massive, multi-partner effort to pre-empt threats to fish and wildlife habitats and the species that depend on them for survival. Wildlife authorities believe this proactive stance shows real promise for the future of Florida's fish and wildlife. FWLI focuses on the birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish Floridians see every day – the species that aren't in trouble but are at the mercy of human activities.

"When we decide to act, and not just react, we can address wildlife concerns before they become emergencies. It's the difference between redirecting flood waters and trying to stop a flood. It's a lot easier if you prepare for the water rising," said Dr. Elsa Haubold, FWC Species Conservation Planning Section leader, who heads up the initiative.

Florida is home to many thousands of species, including insects and other invertebrates. Protecting them is a daunting task. FWLI, part of a federal conservation program that awards wildlife grants to all 50 states, targets protection of habitats and waterways to protect species that are not yet in danger of extinction but might face endangerment if authorities don't move swiftly to protect them.

In July, the initiative will grant $2.6 million in State Wildlife Grant funding to help partners and projects conserve wildlife before they become too rare or costly to protect.

Creatures like butterflies, deer, otters, gray squirrels, rabbits and hundreds of others are abundant today, but like all others that live in the wild, they can't stay abundant forever without wise, coordinated management and habitat protection.

"It seems pretty obvious, but we can't say it too often, when we save their homes, we save the fish and wildlife that are so much a part of the Florida we love," FWLI director Dr. Thomas Eason said.

Johnny Villaronga

The Florida Wildlife Legacy Initiative is working to keep common species common.

This ambitious program is Florida's opportunity to keep common species common. FWLI is an alliance of the FWC and conservation organizations, farmers, hunters, anglers, businesses, other government agencies and individuals, all working together to preserve wildlife diversity. The reality is that when something happens to affect the tree frog population adversely, that affects the species that feed on tree frogs, and it affects the species tree frogs feed on. That's the complex web of life that's repeated with every species throughout nature.

"This is huge. This is the biggest conservation effort Florida has ever undertaken," wildlife biologist Kate Haley said. "It's much less expensive to help animals before they become imperiled.

"The options we have to conserve imperiled species are fewer, and the cost of conservation measures multiplies. If we can keep common species common, we can do it cost-effectively, and people will be able to see and enjoy these species for generations to come."

Eason said, "We make our decisions based on the best science, so we're building on a good foundation, but the real strength of this program is the number and diversity of people who have teamed up to make it happen. At the FWC, our executive director, Ken Haddad, has made this effort a priority, and the agency is full of people who work late and come in on weekends to make sure each program gets what it needs to succeed.

"And there are all these other groups and individuals working together to conserve species and habitats, because we share a common belief in the importance of this effort. It's a very uniting and humbling experience to know you are working on something that will live long after you're gone."

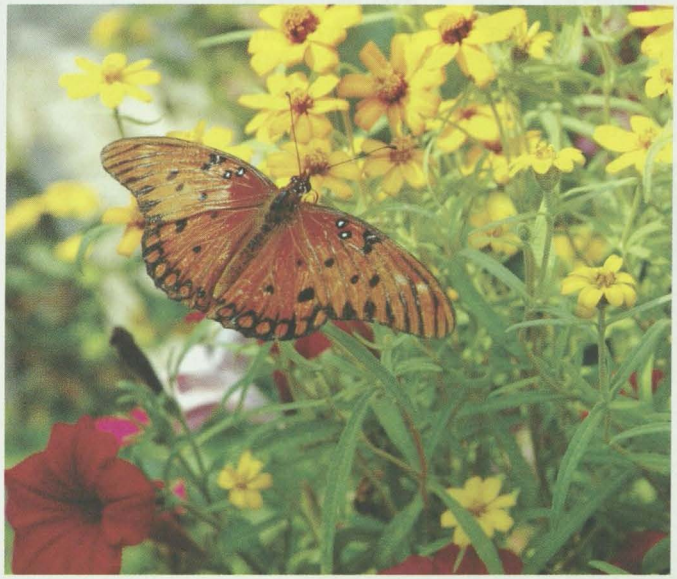
Every wild critter that swims, flies, walks, leaps or slithers in Florida will benefit from the initiative, and ultimately, that will benefit the people who live here and visit here. The partners who have mobilized under this project feel driven to preserve the natural character that defines the essence of Florida. FW

James Valentine

Send us your best shot!

2006 Florida Wildlife Photo Contest

Florida Wildlife Magazine is pleased to announce its 2006 photo contest. Winning entries will be published in the January/February 2007 issue of *Florida Wildlife* and posted on the magazine's Web site.



Tim Donovan

Categories

- **Living wild.** Any wild animal(s) pictured in a Florida habitat. This includes mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects or fish.
- **Up close.** A close-up or macro view of nature. Plants, natural materials or animals may be pictured.
- **Natural scenes.** Where Florida's animals live.
- **Recreation.** People outdoors and enjoying Florida's recreational opportunities.

Prizes

Grand prize: $300 awarded for best overall photograph.
First place winners in each category will be awarded $100.
Second prize winners will receive $75.
Third place winners will receive $50.

Awards of Merit may be given and winners will receive a year's subscription to *Florida Wildlife*.

Rules:

- Wildlife pictured must be live – pictures of mounted wildlife are not eligible.
- Images must be taken within the state of Florida.
- All entries must be received by 5 p.m. Friday, Sept. 1, 2006. Entries received after this date will be automatically disqualified and returned to the entrant.
- Employees of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) or their immediate families are not eligible to compete.
- Photographs previously submitted to or published by *Florida Wildlife* Magazine or any other FWC publications are not eligible.
- One-time publication rights to each photograph must be available.
- All entries will be judged by *Florida Wildlife* Magazine staff and other employees of the FWC. The decisions of the judges are final.
- The judges reserve the right to decide whether entries in a category merit three awards. Three prizes may not be awarded in all categories.
- Winning entries posted on the Web site may have watermarks added.

Entry Procedures:

- No more than 20 entries will be accepted from a single entrant.
- Entries must be accompanied with a self-addressed mailer with sufficient postage for return of materials via U.S. mail.
- Entries must contain only photo contest material. No other correspondence should be included.
- A single, legible, letter size (8 1/2" x 11") log must accompany each entry. A pdf log may be downloaded from the magazine's Web site (www.FloridaWildlifeMagazine.com) but is not required. The log sheet must contain the following information:

  Name of photographer

  Mailing address

  Telephone number, including area code

  E-mail address (if entrant has e-mail)

  Category

  Subject of photo

  Where photo was taken

  When photo was taken

  Camera model

- Entries may be submitted as:

  Prints. Should be 8"x10" and not framed or matted.

  Transparencies. Preferred size is 35mm. All entries must be in positive transparency form, negatives will not be accepted. Slides must be mounted.

  Digital images. Digital images may be submitted on a CD, accompanied by 8"x10"" color prints or laser copies.

- The photographer's name and address must appear and be legible on the back of each print, on the transparency mount or on the CD.
- Manipulation of images should be kept at a minimum (such as saturation, contrast, dodging, eliminating dust spots, etc.). Images in which content has been eliminated, added, rearranged, etc. will not be accepted.
- Entries will be returned via U.S. mail beginning in January 2007.
- Entrant's information (address, phone, e-mail) will not be shared or used by the FWC for any reason other than communicating with entrant regarding this contest.

CSI FWC

Research at the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) continues to yield information that aids the Division of Law Enforcement. As they investigate violations, officers encounter different types of physical, chemical and biological evidence. Effective use of forensic analysis enhances investigators' ability to determine if violations have occurred, how they occurred and who committed them.

In a recent case, a known poacher was suspected of illegal possession of a snook during a closed season. When a FWC officer confronted him, the suspect dumped a fish from a bucket back into the water. The officer seized the bucket and the suspect's fishing tackle. The bucket yielded six fish scales and fish slime containing blood – bearing sufficient DNA evidence to confirm they came from a snook, thus confirming that suspect had been in illegal possession of a snook. In addition to charges of possessing a snook during the closed season, the suspect was found guilty of tampering with evidence, a second-degree felony.

For more on the FWRI forensics program, visit research.MyFWC.com/features/category _ sub.asp?id=6780.

Governor, cabinet sign safe-boating proclamation

Gov. Jeb Bush and Cabinet members voiced support of the FWC and its partners' efforts to increase boating safety awareness and lessen boating deaths statewide and signed a proclamation designating May 20-26 as Florida's National Safe Boating Week.

"By signing this proclamation, I encourage and challenge all Floridians and visitors to our state to be cautious and alert while boating," Bush said. "It's always important to practice safe boating, and that starts with all boaters, regardless of their age, wearing life jackets while on the water."

FWC Capt. Richard Moore said he is pleased with the Governor and Cabinet's support of FWC and its partners' – the National Safe Boating Council, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadron – efforts to ensure boating continues to be one of the greatest recreational activities in Florida.

The partners endeavor to increase public awareness about safe boating practices and the importance of everyone wearing a life jacket while on a small boat.

The proclamation encourages Floridians and visitors to stay alert for danger approaching from any direction, develop a life jacket habit, take an approved safe boating course and get a vessel check.

"Florida leads the nation in registered boats, and I am glad to say efforts throughout the state have led to dramatic reductions in boating accident rates in spite of our growing boating population," Col. Julie Jones, FWC's law enforcement director, told the Governor and Cabinet.

"I believe we live in the greatest boating state in the nation," she said. "We intend to see it just gets better – and safer – for all of us to enjoy."

FWC provides relief for tortoise relocation

FWC Executive Director Ken Haddad has approved adjustments to the agency's policy on relocating gopher tortoises in response to concerns of the public and stakeholders.

The new policy will enable officials to move more tortoises out of harm's way by enlarging the area around development where they can relocate tortoises. Previous restrictions provided officials could move tortoises no more than 50 miles north to south. The revised policy sets a 100-mile limit and allows relocation of tortoises with low risk of spreading disease.

Thomas J. Dunkerton

Gopher tortoise hatchling on the move.

These changes will give home-owners, developers and consultants more-flexible options to save gopher tortoises threatened by land development.

"This office will implement the new measures immediately, and this should be useful in timely relocation of tortoises for conservation," Angela Williams, FWC permit office coordinator, said. "These measures will provide interim relief while we revise the tortoise permitting process over the next several months."

For details of these changes log on to MyFWC.com/permits/protected-wildlife/permits.html#gophertortoise.

News & **Notes**

FWC officers rescue fawn

Two FWC law enforcement officers came to the rescue of a fawn on the Suwannee River near Hart Springs.

The officers were doing their jobs, protecting the state's natural resources, when they saw the fawn. It tried following its mother across the river, but couldn't keep its head above the water. The doe swam across the river, reached the other bank, turned and called to the fawn, who continued struggling to swim toward her.

FWC Officers James Umhoefer and Travis Hooker came to the rescue. They pulled their boat along side the fawn. Umhoefer plucked the animal out of the water and into the patrol boat.

After the fawn recovered, the officers released it where they had seen the doe exit the river. The two were reunited, according to the officers.

Travis Hooker

FWC Officer James Umhoefer holds the fawn rescued from the river.

Photo by Jamie Adams

2007 SPECIAL-OPPORTUNITY SPRING TURKEY HUNTS

Your chance to bag an Osceola turkey

"Crown Jewel" of the Grand Slam

Two ways to apply:

- MyFWC.com/license
- License agents and tax collectors' offices

Improve your chances of being selected by submitting as many nonrefundable $5 applications as you would like.

HUNT FLORIDA

MyFWC.com/hunting

No bird flu found in Florida or the United States

Several recent television programs have plotlines revolving around flu pandemics. It's important to remember these are works of fiction designed to entertain – not factual accountings of a real world event.

The H5N1 avian influenza is almost exclusively a disease of birds. The H5N1 virus has not yet appeared in the United States, and there is no influenza pandemic (human flu that causes a global outbreak) in the world at this time.

The FWC is part of the team monitoring for bird flu in Florida and has stepped up surveillance of free-ranging birds and priority species. Wild birds involved in die-offs will be collected, examined and tested for many wildlife diseases.

There are actions the average birder, hunter and outdoor enthusiast, can take to help monitor for dead birds and precautions they can take to reduce the risk of contracting any disease from wildlife.

Precautions

- Wear rubber gloves while cleaning game or cleaning bird feeders.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke while cleaning game.
- Wash hands with soap and water or alcohol wipes immediately after handling game or cleaning bird feeders.
- Wash tools and work surfaces used to clean game birds with soap and water, then disinfect with a 10-percent bleach solution.
- Separate raw meat, and anything it touches, from cooked or ready-to-eat foods to avoid contamination.
- Cook game birds thoroughly. Meat should reach an internal temperature of 155-165 degrees Fahrenheit to kill disease organisms and parasites.

Actions

- Report dead bird(s) at MyFWC.com/bird.
- Do not handle sick or dead birds.

In addition, there are steps individuals, families and communities can take to prepare should a pandemic occur in the United States:

- Keep a supply of food and medicines on hand in case you have to stay home.
- Practice good public health measures like frequent hand-washing.
- Stay home when sick.

Visit www.pandemicflu.gov for additional information.

Illegal hunting scheme goes awry

A scheme to horde and monopolize hunting privileges on state wildlife management areas has netted a Polk County man a hefty three-year prison sentence with no chance of early release.

Investigators from the FWC discovered that Alfred Joseph Tatro submitted multiple applications for free hunting permits, using the names of others without their permission. Tatro then used the ill-gotten permits himself, gave the permits away to friends or traded them for hunts on other state lands.

Tatro's scheme was discovered when information on hunt applications was cross-referenced in the agency's computer database.

FWC officers and investigators subsequently arrested Tatro who later plead guilty to one count of possession of a firearm by a felon, one count of scheming to defraud and one count of falsifying information on a state hunting application. Tatro's sentence was considerably lighter than He might have received had he not reached a plea agreement.

Ladies, get "hooked" on the fabulous sport of fishing

Women of all angling abilities can acquire and fine-tune fishing skills at the award-winning "Ladies, Let's Go Fishing" seminar. Hosted by the FWC and presented by Mercury Outboards, the program offers a full weekend of educational fishing activities on August 18-20 at the Sarasota Yacht Club. The Sarasota Hyatt is the host hotel.

The seminar will kick off with a welcome reception at the Sarasota Yacht Club on Friday evening, August 18, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. The classroom portion starts at 7:30 a.m. on Saturday, August 19, where fishing techniques will be taught at beginner and intermediate/advanced levels by expert instructors. Fishing topics will be: rod and reel basics (for beginners), inshore, offshore, bottom and fly fishing. After lunch, the women will participate in several "hands-on" fishing stations, such as conservation techniques, spin casting, landing and releasing, knot tying, gaffing grapefruits, boat handling, trailer backing and reeling against pressure. On Sunday, a fishing trip is offered, concluding with a fillet class.

Registration for the Sarasota seminar is $120 and includes meals, T-shirts, goody bags, door prizes and more. The fishing adventure, with fishing tackle and bait provided, is additional.
To register or for additional information, contact "Ladies, Let's Go Fishing," (954) 475-9068, billfishbetty@hotmail.com or visit www.ladiesletsgofishing.com.

Running the Marks

Article and photographs by Capt. Fred Everson

It's 10 a.m. and the heat is already stifling at the boat ramp.

"I can't wait to get on plane and turn on the air," I say to my buddy as we hustle the boat off the trailer, sweat soaking my shirt instantly.

"Yeah, man. Let's go," urges my partner.

Midsummer fishing in west central Florida is dominated by intense sunshine, heat, humidity and sudden storms – and the ever-present threat of hurricanes. It's a challenge to keep fishing, but there are several ways to beat the heat of the season, and one of the most productive is "running the marks."

My 17-foot skiff is short on amenities, such as a Bimini top or air conditioning, so one of the best ways to keep from overheating is to put the boat on plane every few minutes. That strategy will not win you many friends on the flats, nor will it be very productive. But in the middle of Tampa Bay, running the marks is a popular method of sight-fishing for cobia, which like to hang on deep-water structure in the summer months.

Cobia are not the only predators to take advantage of shade around midbay structure. Tripletail, for example, like to lie right under the green and red cans that mark the channels; they are also famous for lurking around crab trap buoys. Spanish mackerel and crevalle jacks also hang around deep-water structure because that's where the bait is. And where the mackerel go, sharks follow. All are fair game when I run and gun.

Ideal conditions for this type of fishing are on slack tides, with light winds, clear skies, and good water clarity. Cobia will often swim circles around range markers and channel buoys when the water temperature climbs into the high 80s. On such days, it's not uncommon to sight-fish on a half dozen different marks and hook four or five fish.

The best way to hook up is with live pinfish, keeping the boat off the mark to prevent the fish from spooking, then cast the bait to the mark on a float while the cobia circles to the back side. When the fish turns the corner and finds a struggling pinfish in its face, it will usually whack it.

But those days are rare enough, and when conditions are less than ideal for spotting fish on the surface, I prefer to probe the perimeter of the structure with a half-ounce jighead and a variety of soft plastic tails,

Tip #1

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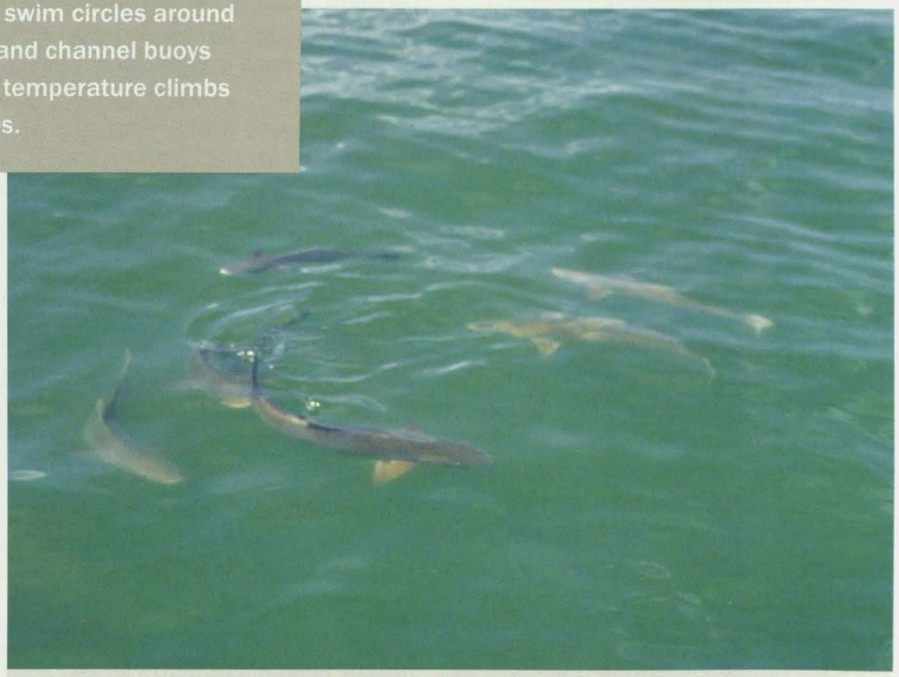


Above: A pod of cobia daisy chaining near a dredge pipe. **Facing page:** Crevalle jacks also feed around deep water structure. This fish hit a jig under a range marker.

including shrimp and crab imitations, curly tails, shad tails and plastic eels. The advantage of these artificials is they cover the water column top to bottom quickly. This tactic also creates an opportunity to catch a variety of game fish that use such structure as feeding stations.

Baitfish hang on the marks for shade, and to get out of the current, they are the main attraction. Fish on the ascending end of the food chain all follow suit.

This is not light-tackle fishing. All fish that hang around structure to feed also use it to hide from predators – including anglers. Get hooked up with a hefty fish, and it's apt to run for cover where pilings and barnacle-encrusted chains will cut it loose as quickly as a sharp filet knife.

Heavy spinning outfits, saltwater bait casters and conventional saltwater tackle are required to drag fish out of cover once the hook is set. The bare minimum for this powerful array of game fish are 20-pound monofilament and 60-pound leaders. And when big mackerel and blacktips predominate, a short length of wire is needed to prevent cut-offs.

To cover the water column on the fast-paced run from mark to mark, a jig, rigged with a plastic tail, is my bait of choice. I've had success with a variety of shapes and colors of tails. Cobia seem to prefer eel imitations, but they will eat just about any color or shape if it passes close to their nose and looks like an easy meal.

Strength of the jig-hook is more important than shape or color of either the jighead or the tail, so don't skimp on quality here. I also use white shad tails, and natural-colored shrimp imitations. Structure fishing calls for stiff rods, heavy line, and tight drags; weak wire hooks simply won't do.

This type of fishing is best done with two or three anglers and is difficult to do alone. One angler needs to run the boat and maintain position, while the other two make the casts.

When one angler hooks up, the other quickly reels in to get his line out of the way and assist in landing the fish.

When a hookup occurs, it's crucial to jam the engine in reverse and back away from the structure. Reactions have to be quick. If you can't drag the fish out in a hurry, even a heavy leader won't prevent a break-off.

Tip #2

The bare minimum for this powerful array of game fish are 20-pound monofilament and 60-pound leaders. And when big mackerel and blacktips predominate, a short length of wire is needed to prevent cut-offs.

Right: A hefty Spanish mackerel was hanging around a channel marker, which also attracts a variety of baitfish. **Next page:** Keli Emery, a tripletail expert, probes a tripod with live shrimp.

Calm, sunny days are best for running and gunning because visibility is better for angler and fish alike. On a windless day, cobia can sometimes be seen waking in orbit around a mark from 40 or 50 yards away. This lets you ease the boat into good casting position from a distance that won't spook the fish.

Sometimes it takes more than one cast, particularly when there is a very big cobia in sight. Nerves come into play, and an inaccurate cast is not unusual – big fish often cause anglers to make mistakes. Two of the good things about cobia are that they don't mind running outboards, and they will take a lure on the third or fourth cast, even if they have looked at it and refused the bait on prior presentations.

Tip #3

Two good things about cobia are that they don't mind running outboards, and they will take a lure on the third or fourth cast, even if they have looked at it and refused the bait on prior presentations.

The last cobia I caught on a fly was in a pod of eight or 10 fish, and the first six casts all had fish follow the fly, but no take. The seventh cast finally produced a solid strike and a hooked fish.

A problem with an area with more than one cobia is that the smallest fish are often first to jump on the lure. On the up side, bigger fish often follow the hooked fish, and will strike another lure out of pure excitement. When that happens, the smaller fish should be horsed to the boat before the two lines get a chance to tangle.

Slack tides are probably most productive for finding cobia on the surface. When the current rips, I seldom seem them on top. When the tide is moving in high gear, I prefer to fish the down-current side of the structure, casting up-current and letting the jig go all the way to the bottom on one cast, and then work each successive cast progressively higher in the water column.

Tripletail usually do not show themselves, preferring to lurk underneath a buoy in the shadows, just a few feet from the surface. To catch these fish, try to shave the side of the buoy with the jig head, but avoid clinking the lure off the can.

When targeting tripletail on slack tides, I prefer a dark colored plastic shrimp on a quarter-ounce jighead.

But when the tide is ripping, a half-ounce jig affords better control in the water column. I rig three heavy spinning rods when running the marks: one with a half-ounce jighead tipped with a

Tip #4

To catch tripletail lurking in the shadows below a buoy, try to shave the side of the buoy with the jighead, but avoid clinking the lure off the can.

Tip #5

When running the marks, rig three heavy spinning rods: one with a half-ounce jighead tipped with a 10-inch black eel and 60-pound monofilament leader for cobia, another rigged with a quarter-ounce jighead and plastic shrimp on 30-pound leader, and the third with a half-ounce jighead with a 4- or 5-inch plastic shad tail rigged on a heavy wire leader.

10-inch black eel and 60-pound monofilament leader for cobia I can see, another rigged with a quarter-ounce jighead and plastic shrimp on 30-pound leader, and the third with a half-ounce jighead with a 4- or 5-inch plastic shad tail rigged on a heavy wire leader.

These three rigs will cover everything you might find on Tampa Bay, outside of huge sharks and giant tarpon, which are always a remote possibility.

When fishing live bait on a slack tide, small pinfish on a float are effective for tripletail. If a cobia is sighted, and I'm fishing live bait, I will reach for the biggest pinfish in the well. I prefer the float here as well, as it restricts the pinfish's ability to maneuver. I once watched two cobia attack a free-lined pinfish not 6 feet from the bow of my boat and after it eluded their snapping jaws five or six times, the cobia turned off and would have nothing further to do with the bait, even after I stunned it a bit to slow it down. For that reason, some anglers trim the pinfish tails with scissors.

However, a float serves the same purpose. I like to wait until the cobia is circling to the backside of the mark, and then make the cast to his blind side. When the fish comes back around the buoy, the bait is there waiting for him. Here the angler at the helm needs to be paying close attention. Soon as the angler hollers "Fish on!" the boat needs to be backing off the structure.

Running the marks is fast-paced and productive, and full of anticipation. The next buoy or range marker offers a new challenge and a refreshing pause from the heat during the in-between runs. Even so, it still gets hot. I couldn't imagine doing this without a hat, plenty of sunscreen, polarized sunglasses and a cooler full of cold drinks.

It's a great way to beat the heat while fishing Tampa Bay in midsummer. And you never know what lurks unseen below the surface on the channel's edge – could be a 2-pound mackerel, a 50-pound cobia, anything in between or perhaps something bigger and badder than you've ever hooked before. FW

Capt. Fred is a full-time fisherman, working out of Ruskin. He's been fishing, writing and photographing for more than 25 years.

Tip #6

When fishing live bait on a slack tide, small pinfish on a float are effective for tripletail.

Dale Burd

Getting back to her roots

By Tony Young

Growing up in a small New Hampshire town during the 1960s, Patti Wilders had little exposure to the sport of hunting. No one in Patti's family or any of her friends were opposed to hunting, but none participated, except for an uncle she didn't see very often.

"I had an uncle who hunted, and he had a real mean hunting dog," Patti said as her bright, brown eyes widened, and her voice took on an excited tone. "We were always told never to go near it, for fear it would bite us. I guess, early on, I kind of associated hunting with that dog, and it sort of put a bad taste in my mouth regarding the sport."

When Patti was 18, she moved to Florida to the much-more-urban Palm Beach County. This relocation definitely did not increase the petite, auburn-haired young woman's chances for getting involved in the hunting experience.

"Palm Beach was a lot different from the place I came from – it had all the elements of a big city," Patti said. "Most of the people I came into contact with weren't real keen on hunting and didn't have a good perception of the sport."

In 1998, Patti saw a write-up in the Palm Beach Post that would later cause her to change her views, while opening the doors to the exciting world of hunting. The article advertised a three-day workshop for women who wanted to learn about recreating in Florida's great outdoors. The workshop was called Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW), and it was to take place at a rustic camp in the Ocala National Forest.

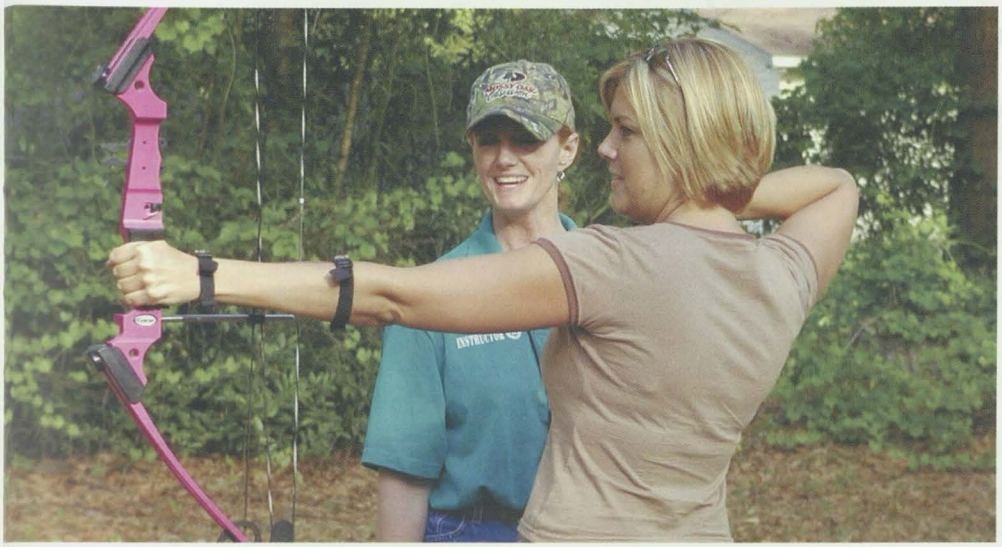
The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) offers BOW workshops primarily for women, 18 years or older who are interested in developing skills associated with hunting, shooting, fishing, boating and camping.

"I thought the program sounded like a lot of fun and would provide a great opportunity to get away from big-city life and revisit my country-girl roots," Patti said.

After Patti convinced a girlfriend to attend the camp with her, both ladies made the rather long drive up from Palm Beach to the "horse-country" of Ocala.

"Even though it's been eight years, I can still vividly remember the opening speech made the first day of camp by then-Wildlife Officer Mike Fischer. He spoke about conservation with such passion

"I love. . . watching and listening to the woods wake up while being as quiet and still as I can be."



Dale Burd

Patti Wilders took her first archery class at the FWC's Ocala "Becoming an Outdoors-Woman" workshop and is now a level II - certified archery instructor.

and conviction. He talked about the 'need' for hunting and why it was such a necessary component of wildlife management," Patti said.

Those words opened Patti's eyes. She began to understand what hunting was all about, and after observing other female campers, realized those who enjoyed hunting and fishing didn't fit into a single demographic. They were all types of people from all walks of life who participated in, and had a love for, the outdoors.

The workshop had such a profound effect on Patti she attended three more sessions, taking every class the program offered.

Her favorite two classes were "basic archery and bowhunting" and "shooting sports – rifles, shotguns and crossbows," and she quickly developed a talent for piercing the bulls-eye. In fact, Patti became so prolific at shooting a bow and firearms in such a short time, Lynne Hawk, BOW state coordinator and FWC employee, recruited her to become a camp instructor.

Patti got so good at shooting a bow, she rapidly attained the rank of level II – certified archery instructor. That certificate not only authorizes her to teach others how to shoot a bow, but also qualifies her to certify individuals wishing to obtain their level I archery instructor certification. This includes being able to certify archery instructors for the state's new National Archery in the Schools Program as well.

Since 2002, Patti has been a BOW instructor, teaching her two favorite classes at the Ocala and Tallahassee workshops. She also teaches hunter safety classes as a certified volunteer hunter safety instructor. In Florida, everyone born after May 31, 1975, must attend and complete a hunter safety class before they can purchase a hunting license.

"The only BOW workshop I don't teach is West Palm Beach in November, because I'm always in Minnesota and South Dakota hunting their deer season," Patti said.

In 1999, she moved to Lake City, where she resides today. It was there the 49-year-old legal assistant met her current boyfriend, Dale Burd of Lake City.

Dale was the first person Patti ever went hunting with.

"He has so much patience with me regarding hunting," Patti said. "I received most of my shooting and hunting skills from attending all those BOW workshops, but I credit Dale as the one who has really helped me put all this knowledge together."

The two didn't start off dating, however. They were good friends and hunting partners. After a couple of years, their friendship grew into something more – and the rest, as they say, is history.

Patti and Dale have been bowhunting together since 2003. Aside from using her favorite Matthews Outback compound bow, Patti also enjoys hunting deer and wild hogs with her stainless-steel Ruger M77 .270-caliber rifle. To date, she has taken one doe with her bow and three hogs with her rifle, all while hunting in Florida.

"One of my most absolute favorite things in life is getting all set up in my climber before the crack of dawn. I love being all settled in in the pitch-black and watching and listening to the woods wake up while being just as quiet and as still as I can. The smell and feel of the cool, clean air with the sounds of songbirds singing and seeing squirrels coming out to look for food – there's just nothing like it," Patti sighed with a satisfied smile.

"When I talk to other women who are thinking about getting into hunting, I urge them to take a BOW class first, and talk with other ladies who have hunting experience," Patti said. "Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions. There are no bad questions, you know?" FW

A new mission for the good ship *Oriskany*

By Henry Cabbage

Local news media wrote about the gallant warship "surrendering to the sea" and "settling into a watery grave," but that is not what I witnessed May 17 when the ex-Oriskany slid beneath the surface of the Gulf of Mexico for its final mission.

After half a century of striking fear into the hearts of America's enemies, the 888-foot retired aircraft carrier took on an assignment to nurture the marine food chain 22 miles offshore from Pensacola. Almost within sight of the cradle of naval aviation, the city where Navy pilots hone their combat skills to beat back enemy warriors, the Oriskany settled onto the floor of the Gulf of Mexico for a last operation that will span centuries. The Oriskany now is the largest artificial reef in American waters.

In 212 feet of water, on a relatively barren area of the gulf floor, the massive ship faces south toward the approach of hurricanes that certainly will assault it in the centuries to come. Engineers believe the ship will weather them with the same gallantry it radiated during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Marine fish and invertebrates will occupy the ship's hull and superstructure. Divers will explore its features, and anglers will pull large fish from the populations that will flourish because the Oriskany is there.

When the Navy announced it would make the carrier available as an artificial reef, Gulf and Atlantic states scrambled to claim it, but Florida eventually won the prize. Edwin Roberts, then-chairman of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation

Commission (FWC) championed the cause of steering the ship to Pensacola for sinking, despite strong bids from other coastal communities.

The economic benefits the ship will bring to Pensacola far outweighed benefits to other communities with abundant natural and artificial reefs, and that was a major consideration, but Pensacola's historical connection to naval aviation was an ever-present factor.

In the early morning of the big day, the first of an estimated 500 vessels of all sizes began arriving at the 1-mile perimeter where the ship would go down. Workers had removed hazardous materials and cut out parts of the hull and internal compartments to control the Oriskany's upright descent through the 212 feel of water to the floor below.

FWC marine biologists made a final sweep of the waters around the ship to ensure no marine mammals or sea turtles were in the area. When they gave the all-clear signal, 22 charges totaling 500 pounds of explosives ripped open the points where the ship was to take on water.

The history

The USS *Oriskany*, a 27,000-ton Ticonderoga-class attack aircraft carrier was built at the New York Navy Yard and commissioned in 1950. The ship served in the Pacific Fleet and was involved in the Korean and Vietnam wars, earning seven battle stars. After 26 years of service, she was decommissioned in 1976, sold for scrapping in 1994 and then repossessed in 1997 before beginning her final mission, becoming an artificial reef, in 2006.

Top: The Oriskany off New York City, December 6, 1950, while en route to conduct carrier qualifications off Jacksonville, Fla. **Above:** Smoke pours from Oriskany's Hangar Bay #1, during the fire on October 26, 1966 which killed 44 of her officers and men.

Official U.S. Navy Photographs, from the collections of the Naval Historical Center

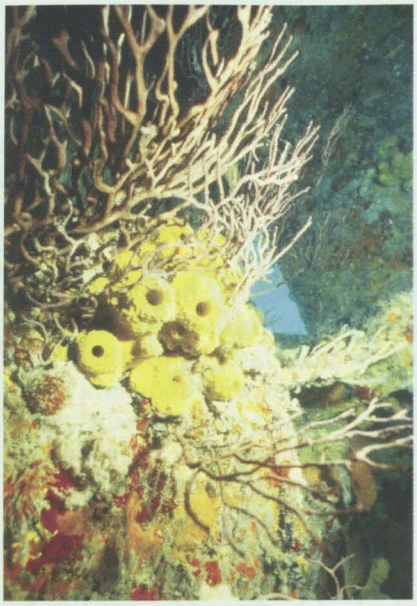
Bill Horn

Florida's artificial reefs

Florida has one of the most active artificial reef programs among the 14 Gulf and Atlantic states involved in this activity. Because of the extent of coastline and statewide involvement in reef activities, the FWC program is a cooperative partnership with local coastal governments and qualified nonprofit corporations.

Dating back to 1920, more than 2,000 documented public artificial reefs have been placed in state and federal waters off the 8,426 miles of Florida's tidal coastline (1,200 miles fronting the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean). Between 30 and 70 public artificial reefs are constructed annually off Florida using a combination of federal, state, local government and private funds.

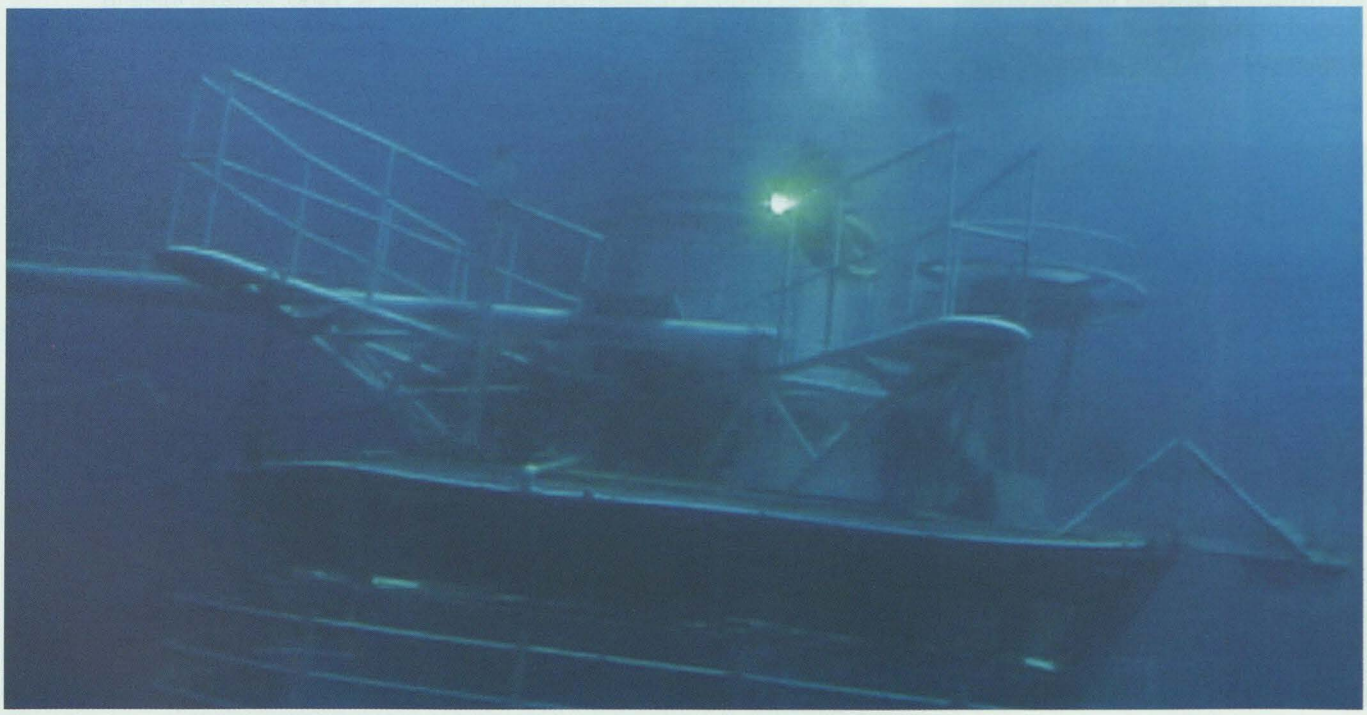
Visit myfwc.com/marine/ar/index.asp for additional information about Florida's artificial reefs, including a list of GPS coordinates.



Tom Maher

Tom Maher

Above: Extensive invertebrate growth covers a leg of the Tenneco Towers artificial reef on the border of Dade and Broward counties. Two old oil rig templates are at the site, moved there from Louisiana. They are in 105 feet of water and rise off the bottom more than 40 feet. **Left:** FWC diver Bill Horn assesses one of two Army M-60 battle tanks deployed at Dade County's Anchorage site in 48 feet of water. **Below:** A diver checks out the newest artificial reef, the Oriskany. The flight deck at the island base is approximately 135 feet below sea level and the highest structure at the top of the island is about 68 feet deep.



Bill Horn

Bill Horn

The sinking

Left: The *Oriskany* is towed past the Pensacola lighthouse on Pensacola Naval Air Station. Built and put into operation in 1858, it's the oldest lighthouse on the Gulf Coast. **Below:** The *Oriskany* begins taking on water as a blast of 500 pounds of explosive is detonated. **Middle:** Sinking more rapidly than expected, the ship tilts to port. **Bottom:** With her nose tilted skyward, the great battleship sinks below the waves to become a haven for marine creatures and a destination for divers.

It was obvious to observers they had not just witnessed a burial at sea. It was more like the metamorphosis that changes a caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly.

Within three minutes, the ship had settled a foot lower in the water. Soon the hanger deck was flooded, and the Oriskany began to list a little to the port side and began to sink more rapidly than expected.

When the stern was nearly down to the water level, the Oriskany rolled a little more to the starboard side, and with its nose pointed slightly skyward, the warship vanished beneath the 3-foot seas as great blasts of air escaped the ship and churned up the surface of the gulf.

At that moment, it was obvious to observers they had not just witnessed a burial at sea. It was more like the metamorphosis that changes a caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly. There was no weeping. People cheered.

The Oriskany has not faded into history. It has merely begun a new era of service. FW

Henry Cabbage is the senior editor of Florida Wildlife *magazine.*

Bill Horn

Bill Horn

Bill Horn

Field Notes

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission sworn personnel are fully constituted police officers with the authority to enforce all laws of the state, not just those relating to resource conservation.

Almost sunk

Officers Ed Chambers and Baryl Martin were on water patrol offshore when they observed a sinking vessel being towed by another vessel. In inclement weather and rough waters, Officer Chambers was able to board the vessel and assist while Officer Martin escorted it. The officers' quick actions resulted in the boaters receiving no injuries and the vessel being raised enough to be fully recovered.

Rattled

Officer Jeff Gier responded to an anonymous call regarding a subject in possession of a venomous reptile. The complainant alleged a man was keeping a rattlesnake in his home while small children were present. The suspect was interviewed and an inspection revealed an improperly-caged rattlesnake. The suspect could not produce the appropriate permit to possess the reptile and was issued two citations and a warning for the violations. The snake was released unharmed into the wild.

Fatal crash

Investigators Bruce Cockcroft and Jason Boswell responded to a vessel crash in which two men died and a third was critically injured. At approximately 11 p.m., a vessel traveling at high speed hit a dock – ejecting a passenger. The vessel continued on, striking a second dock and became wedged under a boatlift. The ejected passenger and the operator died at the scene. The third occupant was critically injured and was airlifted to a hospital. Lieutenant Gary Klein and Officer Chip Butler assisted the investigators at the scene. The investigation is continuing and alcoholic beverage-impairment is suspected as a contributing factor in the crash.

Waitin' on the levee

While on water patrol, Officer J.W. Armstrong observed two male juvenile subjects steal a bulldozer and damage a portion of the pavement on top of a levee. He beached his patrol vessel and pursued the subjects on foot. The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office arrived to set up a perimeter. The two subjects were captured and transported to the Juvenile Assessment Center for processing on charges of grand theft, criminal mischief and resisting arrest without violence. The bulldozer was the property of a contractor doing work on the Herbert Hoover Dike for the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers.

"Hudson" the turtle

Officers Jackey Angelis and Donald Jones were on water patrol when they observed a juvenile loggerhead sea turtle swimming on the surface of the water. The turtle appeared injured, so the officers approached for a closer look and were able to see a propeller cut on the turtle's head. They loaded it into their patrol vessel and transported it to shore. The turtle was released to Ronda Bailer, FWRI sea turtle coordinator and then taken to the Florida Aquarium and given emergency treatment by the aquarium staff who expect it to fully recover.

Fire and water

Officer Jeff Beal was on water patrol when he noticed smoke coming from a shoreline residence. He had an individual place a 911 call and responded in his patrol vessel. Upon arrival, he located a resident and confirmed no one else was inside. The resident had oxygen bottles stored inside which were at risk of exploding. Officer Beal, with assistance, carried the homeowner a safe distance from the fire and returned to help extinguish the flames which were affecting nearby structures.

Talk about weeds

In search of turkey bait, Officer Travis Hooker was patrolling on foot when he discovered approximately 25 marijuana plants hidden among palmetto bushes. Officer Hooker coordinated surveillance efforts for several days. Officer Robert Johnston was on surveillance when he heard an ATV drive up to the area and stop. A man walked up to the plants with a bucket and began to water them. Approaching the subject, Officer Johnston identified himself. After a short foot pursuit, the subject was arrested on felony cultivating charges. The marijuana plants, an ATV and the watering bucket were seized as evidence.

Quick response

Officer Jeff Babauta's patrol boat was tied up to a boat ramp from which a person was throwing a cast net. Officer Babauta saw the cast-netter fall backwards into waist-deep water, realized the person was having a seizure and jumped into the water and pulled the person safely to shore. EMS evaluated the person who appeared to be in stable condition.

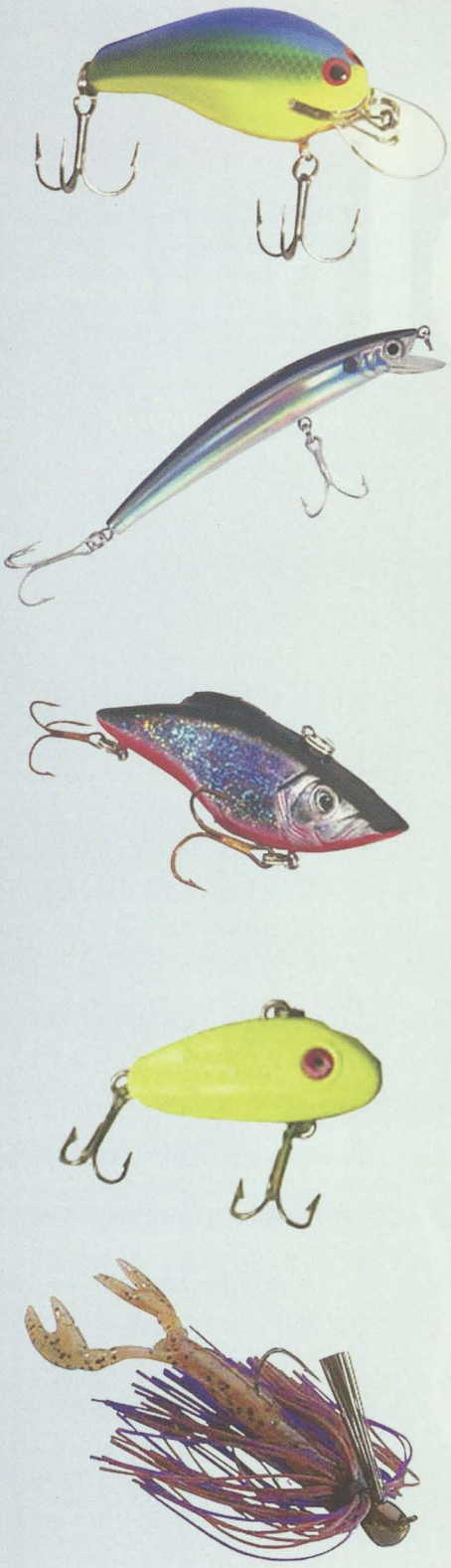
Once an officer...

A retired FWC officer was checking mounds at the Aucilla Management Area when he observed two people digging. The former officer photographed the subjects and called into dispatch to file a complaint. Officers Dale Wilcox and Stefanie Wilcox interviewed the retired officer and had the film developed. The two subjects were located, cooperated fully and were cited for damaging Suwannee River Lands.

Catching bass with COOL bait

By Joe Zentner

A largemouth bass will attempt to eat virtually anything it can catch and swallow.



Top to bottom: Bagley original round lip lures; Yo-Zuri suspending crystal minnows; Berkley frenzy rattl'rs; the original Buckeye shad; Stanley Jigs finesse jig.

Bass are one of the most sought-after of all game fish. Their appeal spans cultures, age groups and genders.

Bass are aggressive feeders and agile enough to pursue and catch most of their favorite foods. These marine creatures are most easily caught during a feeding frenzy, but can often be enticed into striking bait for reasons other than hunger.

The largemouth bass is marked by a series of dark blotches forming a ragged horizontal stripe along the length of each side. These stripes are referred to as "lateral lines." The lines are used by a largemouth bass as motion detectors to locate prey or to avoid becoming prey at night, or in other dark water conditions.

Bass are predatory by nature and at times will strike at virtually anything which enters their world.

If something moves and they can get that something into their large mouth, bass will attempt to swallow it. Fact is, a largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoidese*) will attempt to eat virtually anything it can catch and swallow.

Bass can be caught on minnows, worms or other live bait, plus poppers presented with a fly rod, or plugs thrown from a casting rod. Because bass are oftentimes associated with weeds, a weedless bait or lure is oftentimes highly desirable.

Largemouth bass spend the summer in both shallow and deep water. During the summer, anglers preferring to fish shallow should concentrate on structure that is visible to the eye. This includes grass beds, fallen trees, standing trees, docks, and rocky banks. These areas can be targeted from shoreline or from a boat. Anglers fishing deeper water should look for offshore humps, roadbeds and wood or rock piles on the bottom.

The most frequently asked question any angler receives is: "What do you catch them on?"

When deciding what to use, anglers must first consider whether they want to use live bait or artificial lures.

One who is just starting bass fishing may want to begin by using live bait. More-experienced anglers prefer using artificial lures. The type of bait, whether live or artificial, is a matter of personal preference and fishing style.

Some anglers prefer a more laid-back approach using live bait, while others prefer a more-active approach using artificial lures. The best live baits for largemouth bass are golden shiners, nightcrawlers and small baitfish. It helps for an angler to carry bait of different sizes to determine which is more effective.

Lure color is one of the keys to bass angling success.

Success in the art of angling often depends on a combination of circumstance and knowledge. Many bass aficionados have come to recognize that lure color is a significant factor in putting food on the table. Some scientific evidence supports this notion, affording clues you might want to consider the next time you try to decide which lure is likely to be most productive in a particular situation.

Research conducted at the University of Kentucky suggests that bass are more favorably

disposed toward colors at the so-called "cool" end of the color spectrum, the coolest hues being purple, reddish-blue and violet. Conversely, fish in lab experiments tend to show an aversion to yellow and other "warm" colors.

Considering that blue and green predominate in an aquatic environment, where many baitfish sport such tints, it's not surprising that game species are favorably disposed toward lures of those colors.

Having said that, however, don't conclude that the aversion bass have for "warm" colors means they won't strike at lures of those hues – if they're presented in small amounts. Lures with red or orange bellies have long proven to be hot sellers, perhaps because they remind bass of crayfish, which are favorite forage critters which have traces of those colors on their pincers.

Red is a particularly effective lure color in the spring, perhaps attributable to the tendency of some minnows to turn red from the iodine in the fish eggs they forage on at that time of year. Lures with just a smattering of yellow also draw strikes, but bass seem threatened by too much of this color. Also, keep in mind, a lure with a pattern of color on it may work better than a lure that has a pure color to it.

When choosing lure colors, you also need to consider water clarity.

In reasonably clear water on a sunny day, you're likely to be most successful if you use hues that fall into the cool range of the color spectrum. Lures that are blue, chartreuse, violet or a combination of those colors are good choices in that situation. So are silver, chrome and gold models.

In clear water on a cloudy day, you're apt to do best with lures of earth-tone colors, such as combinations of brown and white, black and chartreuse, gold and black. Gold has proven to be a particularly productive color under clear/cloudy conditions. Chartreuse or fluorescent-colored lures have the greatest visibility in turbid water.

Another important factor to consider is the prevailing forage in an area.

If you have reason to believe bass are feeding on shad, it only makes sense to go with shad-colored lures. If you're fishing around rocky habitat, you might find the key to angling success is a bait that has crayfish colors – perhaps in the form of an orange belly and a brown or green back.

While bass can probably see most colors of the spectrum during daylight hours, they may be colorblind on dark nights.

The astute angler then resorts to a dark lure. Backlit by the sky, this bait will present a distinctive silhouette to fish below. Though such tactics may prove effective, keep in mind that lure color is only one of many variables that can spell the difference between bass fishing success and failure. Equally important are such factors as proper fishing depth, bait size and the action an angler imparts to the bait. Happy angling, and always remember to clean your catch before you cook it. FW

Joe Zentner is a 63-year-old-retired professor, freelance writer and avid angler. A chronic insomniac, he works at his computer mainly between the hours of 2 and 8 a.m.

Top to bottom: Lucky Craft pro tune LVR series; Optimum Baits crashing thunder spinnerbait; Berkley Gulp! lizard; Rapala DT sure set; Venom 3" mad tom.

FWC Reserve Officer Greg Miles (left) and full-time Officer John Giles (right) getting ready to head out on patrol.

Living a wild dream

By Leslie Roberts

Moving stealthily through a central Florida forest on the trail of a man suspected of slitting his own mother's throat from ear to ear, attorney Greg Miles realized he was a far cry from the coat-and-tie culture he knows.

But that's at least part of the appeal for the volunteer member of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) reserve program, who helped state and local police track a murder suspect in Lake County in 2001.

Miles, 49, has been a reserve officer for 16 years. A Winter Park resident, he says his love of the outdoors led him to pursue volunteering for FWC.

"I've always had a great love of the outdoors and a love of fishing and hunting. I like to be around people," Miles said. "By and large, most of the folks we encounter are very good people and they like the same things we do."

Working alongside full-time law enforcement officers, he's made boating under-the-influence arrests, burning under-the-influence arrests and helped rescue the pilot of a downed plane.

"You run the gamut, from being bored silly, slapping mosquitoes, to having blue lights on chasing after someone," Miles said.

Yet while reserve officers' duties range in description from instructional to adventuresome, they receive no pay, and they spend their own money to outfit themselves for the job at hand.

In the world of the FWC reserve officer, around $2,000 will buy the equipment it takes to risk life and limb.

"We have kind of an exclusive group," said Lt. Sheila Rowden, statewide FWC reserve program coordinator. "(Law enforcement) is dangerous. When it is most dangerous is nights and weekends, and that's when most reserve officers ride."

Currently there are about 77 reserve officers in Florida. They represent a diverse segment of Florida's population and "a huge potential to enhance" the agency's commissioned law enforcement, Rowden said.

During boat patrols, reserve officers can serve as an extra pair of hands and eyes for full-time officers, who often have to struggle alone with the tasks of holding a boat, writing a citation and observing the boat's occupants. In an airplane, they can help look for the play of flashlights across a field at night.

"The reserve program for FWC is integral to the Division of Law Enforcement. They're an added asset to the citizens of this state, and it doesn't cost us really anything," said Maj. Paul Ouellette of FWC's Boating and Waterways Section in Tallahassee, who has overseen reserve officers in the past. "They supplement our enforcement abilities. They look like us – their uniforms are very similar. They work in some cases independently and in others alongside officers and serve as backup."

Those who like the reserve program tend to like it for a long time.

A case in point is Jim Pickard, 61, who has served as a reserve officer for 23 years. The Jacksonville resident sometimes puts in more than 500 volunteer hours annually, despite the fact that he worked full-time as an industrial arts teacher until 2003 and has three children and six grandchildren, with another grandchild on the way.

"It made me a very active individual," he said.

Reserve program participants are required to complete a six-month FWC law enforcement training program and provide their own firearms, gun belts, ballistic vests,

From top to bottom: Reserve Officers attend the same mandatory re-training as full time officers; Reserve Officer Katherine Preston on patrol with a full time officer during the annual Gasparilla Pirate Festival in Tampa; Reserve Officer Donald Trussell handles an alligator while assisting with an educational event in the Northwest Region.

life jackets and foul-weather gear. FWC provides uniforms to reserve officers who put in 300 hours annually. Those with fewer than 300 hours buy their own. Their reasons for joining the reserve are as varied as their backgrounds.

"Some always wanted to be a cop and just can't afford to," Rowden said. "It's a very fun job. It's outside – you get boats and buggies and ATVs. Others just want to give back. They want to be a part of protecting and preserving Florida's resources. They come join us and they do what they always wanted to do."

That was the case for Lila Wise, 52, a Milton stay-at-home mom and wife who marked 15 years of service as a reserve officer May 7.

She wanted a career in law enforcement as a young woman, but didn't meet the height requirements in place at the time – at 5-feet, 4-inches, she was two inches too short. When she found out about the reserve program, she knew it was something she wanted to do.

Reserve Officers representing the South Region pose with full time staff during the 2006 Annual Meeting in Ocala.

"I've enjoyed it," she said. "I like the outdoors, and law enforcement is a different experience."

Other states across the nation also use volunteers to augment their wildlife conservation officers. Most of the participants in Texas' deputy game warden program are wealthy ranchers with an interest in hunting and protecting land rights. They don't wear uniforms or get paid. The program is partially state-funded.

Pennsylvania operates a volunteer deputy wildlife conservation officer program that is entirely funded by hunting and other license sales. The agency provides training and uniforms to its volunteers, who use their own vehicles and firearms on the job.

One of the Florida program's greatest strengths – its reliance on donations and volunteers over taxpayer dollars – is also one of its greatest weaknesses. Potential reserve candidates sometimes can't afford the costs involved.

After Rowden took over as coordinator in 2004, she concentrated her efforts on creating both a more standardized reserve officer roster and selection criteria. She also began to look for ways to fund the program.

"It came down to finding out who we had and finding out what kind of resources were out there," said Capt. Simon Dixon, accreditation manager for the agency. "When Sheila took over the program we had 150 reservists on the books, but nobody really knew who they were or what their training was."

Rowden was able to garner a grant for $5,000. She had asked for $300,000.

She's also hoping to find ways to fund a group effort to get an FWC-run law enforcement academy up and running and to supply reserve officers with the equipment they need.

Dixon said the program continues to evolve after the 1999 merger of the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, the Marine Fisheries Commission, and elements of the state Department of Environmental Protection. He'd like to step up recruitment efforts.

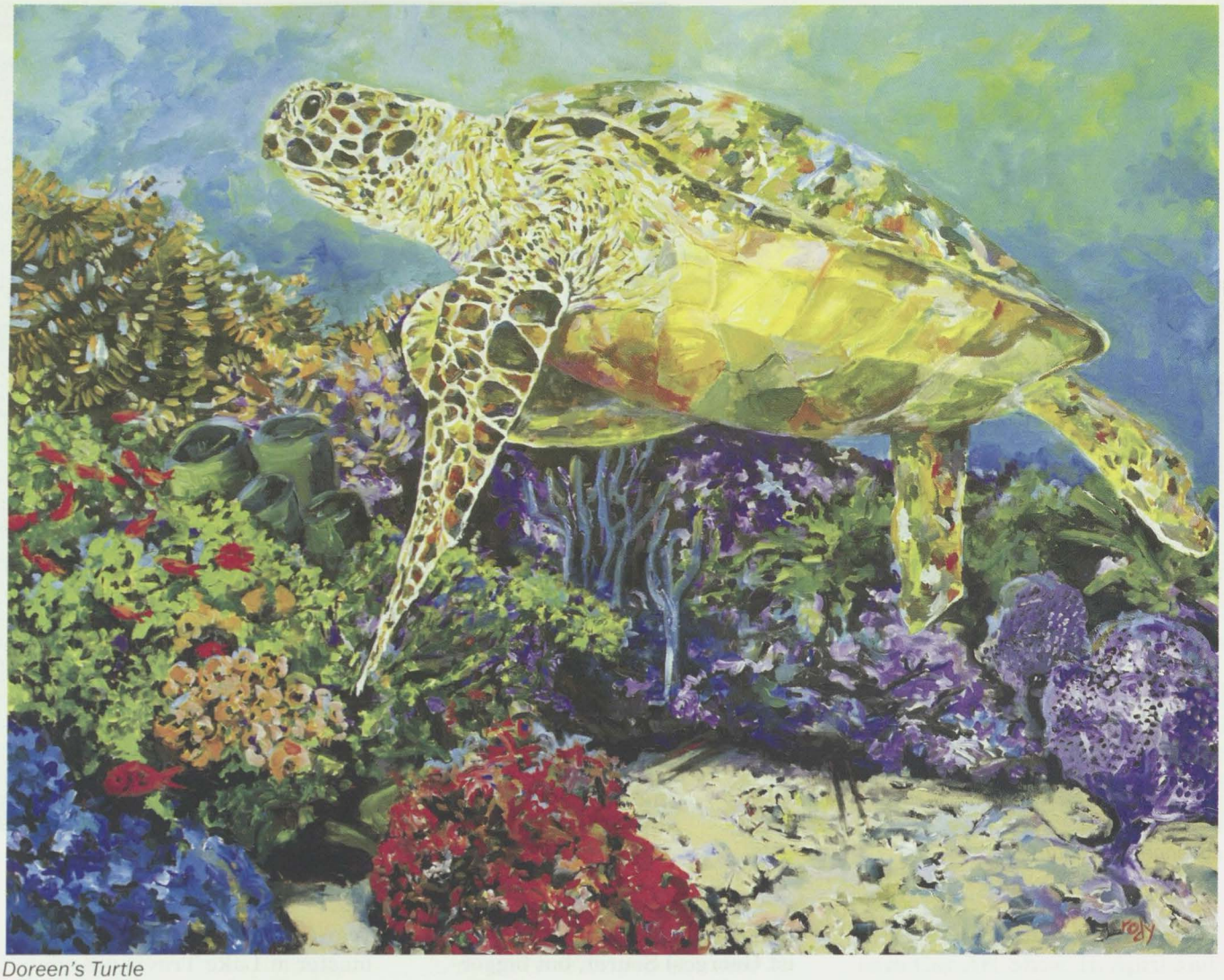
"I see growth within the agency and the reserve program," he said. "I expect we will double if not triple the program in the next five years." FW

Leslie Roberts is a freelance writer. She lives in the woods in the Florida Panhandle with her husband and 3-year-old. Fluent in toddlerese, she enjoys exploring the outdoors with her son, even when he makes her sing "Itsy Bitsy Spider" the entire time they're out.

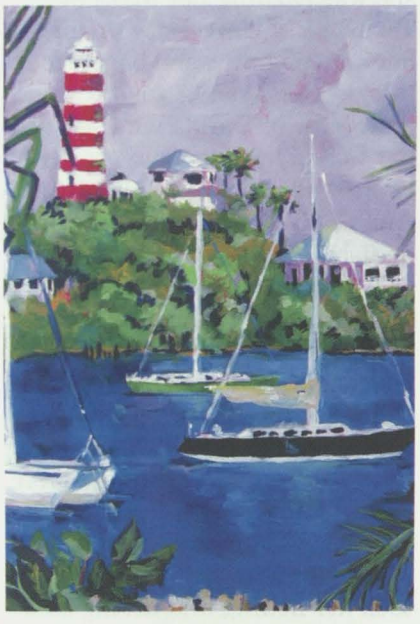
Contribute to the program

Lt. Sheila Rowden, statewide FWC Reserve Program coordinator and others set up a fund with the Wildlife Foundation of Florida to help with the reserve program's costs. To contribute, make checks payable to the WFF Reserve Program and mail to Wildlife Foundation of Florida, P.O. Box 11010, Tallahassee, FL, 32302.

For more information about the program, visit MyFWC.com/law/reserves.htm.



Doreen's Turtle



Joe's Hope Town

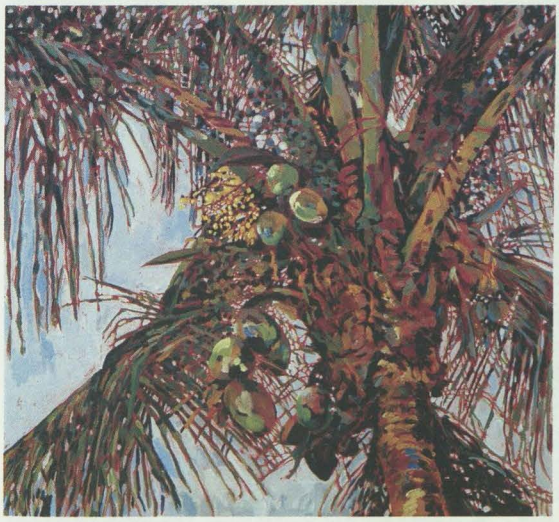
The fish artista

By Andy Lindstrom

A successful career woman with a master's degree in business administration and her own State Farm insurance agency, Kim Rody was attending a seminar in Chicago on how to make even more money when the discussion leader posed the question that changed her life.

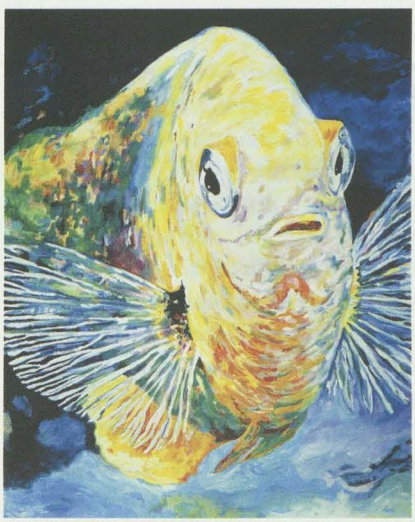
"He asked us to imagine where we wanted to be when we were older," Rody said from her Stuart home. "And I got this instant image of a bungalow on a beach in South Florida or the Bahamas, with me tending a garden and painting. 'Paint?' I said to myself. 'Where did that come from?' I never dreamed I could do that for a living. But I gave myself five years to see if I could make it as an artist. And now, here I am."

"The fish artista," as she calls herself, Rody has indeed come a long way from selling insurance to painting marine life, seascapes, the tropics and whatever else catches her eye in a DayGlo style she described as "kind of impressionistic but not exactly. Sort of pointillism



Louanne's Coconut Tree

Blue-Striped Grunts



Big Damsel

like (French neoimpressionist Georges) Seurat, but bigger. Much bigger, so the images don't really become clear until you step way back."

Descriptions of Rody's acrylic on canvas images include such words as dramatic, colorful and vibrant to describe her fanciful, super-size work such as a larger-than-life sailfish that measures almost nine feet from scissor tail to sword-shaped jaw. She attributes her fondness for bright colors to a love for the often gaudy marine creatures she visits on scuba and snorkeling trips to Bahama's Abaco Islands. "I'm attracted to colorful reef fish," she said. "They're a lot more fun to paint than deep-water types that are mostly just shades of blue or grey."

Among her many past endeavors, Rody spent several years as a certified PADI dive master at Lake Travis outside Austin, Texas. That came while she was earning her MBA at Texas A&M University. After her art epiphany, she began to take lessons from a wise instructor in Dallas who advised her to find her own artistic style rather than to paint by the book. And that's when she got hooked on fish.

"I was very well heeled, won a lot of (sales) contests and went all over the world," she said of her former persona. "But I had to sell insurance. So when I found that I had the talent to make a living painting the things I love, the switch wasn't that hard."

Born and raised in the Miami area, with a dad who took her fishing and diving on a regular basis out of Key Largo, Rody was groomed early on to

Pelicans

what she called "the whole saltwater thing."

Her art career actually got its start in Dallas, although its market for colorful saltwater scenes quickly proved less than profitable. Eventually, she found her niche at Marsh Harbor in the Abacos, selling "a whole bunch of stuff" to well-heeled tourists looking for souvenirs and second-home owners who wanted to decorate with a tropical twist.

"I used to drive back and forth from Dallas with my Explorer stuffed with paintings, then rent a boat or take a ferry from the mainland," she said. "After the second or third time, I asked myself why I lived in Texas. So, four years ago, I moved to Stuart."

Rody's paintings – the acrylic brushed into swirling textures to create water movement, coral and underwater plants – now sell in shops, restaurants and galleries from Palm Beach to the Keys and throughout the Bahamas. Last year, she built a two-story garage with an upstairs workroom, but she still paints in her house, usually at night and often from digital photos that she takes herself.

As for her piscatorial subject matter, "First I paint 'em, and then I eat 'em," she said with a laugh. "A friend and I just bought a 31-foot Sierra powerboat that we take back and forth to a mooring in Hopetown (Abacos) for diving and to deliver more pictures. It's a pretty good life."

To make sure her new life remains both profitable and good, Rody also exhibits her work at about a half dozen art shows each year including the Abaco Art Festival and Treasure Cay Art Show. In April and December she shows at home to what she called "private collectors and people with big walls."

Not long ago, Rody took home a first-place ribbon from Martin County's first-ever juried art show. Her sailfish – that really big one that didn't get away – was chosen as official logo for Stuart's popular art fest. She also finds time to donate works for charities such as the Treasure Coast Wildlife Center and Helping People Succeed.

"Every day is Saturday for me," she told an interviewer from *Crossings Magazine*. "I like to paint on Saturday."

For more on Rody and her paintings, click on the Web site www.fishartista.com. Her studio is in Stuart and her phone number is (772) 341-6566. FW

Poling for oscars

By Gary A. Anderson

Smaller than bass, but larger than sunfish, oscars offer a feisty fight and a tasty delight. They are easily taken on light tackle or fly-fishing gear.

Oscars, non-native fish, have become widespread in southern parts of Florida and other warm locales. It's thought that they became established in southern waters during the 1950s after being freed by aquarium owners and anglers.

Non-native species releases can cause severe environmental problems, and as a result, introduction of any exotic fish is illegal in Florida and is a second-degree misdemeanor punishable by up to a $500 fine and/or 60 days in jail.

There are a number of canals just south of Venice, in North Port, loaded with Oscars waiting to be offered a tiny morsel. So what are you waiting for?

My favorite method for catching oscars, which kids love as well, is with a cane pole. Cane-polers have fun plus collect hefty stringers of this mighty mite by using live worms for bait.

Any Florida resident fishing with live or natural bait, using poles or lines which are not equipped with a fishing line retrieval mechanism, and fishing for noncommercial purposes in the county of her or his residence does not need a fishing license. A rod with reel attached or fishing by any method in a Fish Management Area requires a valid freshwater fishing license.

Many of us remember when people fished with a long stick of wood or a cane stem. I remember when you could purchase a bamboo pole at most any gas station, corner store or bait shop. Cane-fishing was a way of life.

No license was needed, just the will to fish plus a cane, line, hook, bobber, sinker and the time to sit on a grassy bank. Baits of choice were crickets, grasshoppers, Georgia red wigglers, night crawlers, dough balls or stink bait.

The bamboo poles of yesterday are few and far between, one might say almost extinct. Bamboo has been replaced with carbon fibre and fiberglass. Rods now come in different lengths, strengths and designs.

Modern poles are similar to long rod blanks. They range in length between 12 and 36 feet. Most are telescopic with the different sections sliding together, making for easy transportation. Another popular design is a pull-apart pole. Either type makes a good fishing pole, but I prefer telescopic.

Prepare your rod by tying fishing line onto the end of the pole tip. I use 12-pound test line but others I know suggest 25-pound. The length of your line will be equal to the length of your pole. I attach a slip bobber and a crappie hook to the line.

I prefer using tapered-type float rigs, as opposed to a simple float bobber. The tapered float rig provides less resistance in the water and tends to get more bites.

When choosing a pole float or floating rig, I suggest the European variety made of balsa. Pole floats have a small body, slender stem and streamlined design. The pole float body is located nearer the top of the float. This reduces the weight needed for it to sink. The body is usually made from balsa wood since it is very buoyant, yet strong. Balsa wood also allows for many different shapes and designs. The shape and design of a body affects the way the float sits in the water and the way it responds to a fish taking the hook.

When pole-fishing, you should use both hands. One hand is used to hold the butt of the pole while the other is used to grasp underneath the pole out in front of you. This helps balance the pole. Slide the pole forward or backwards to find the point at which the pole is perfectly balanced – when you don't have to struggle to hold the weight of the pole with either hand.

The pole will end up being held at an angle in front of you. If you are right-handed, you will probably want to use your right hand on the butt, and your left hand out the front. Held this way, the pole tip will tend to point to the left.

Hooking and landing fish requires coordination and patience. As with normal float fishing, the float tip will move around or sink when a fish takes the bait. Fish are 'struck' by simply tilting the pole tip up in the air, the result of pushing down on the pole butt with your rear hand.

It is important that you not jerk the pole tip, lift too quickly or lift with a lot of force. All you need is to simply set the hook into the fish's mouth. If you use the recommended barbless or fine-wire hooks, the fish will often do so itself.

Oscars are brownish in color with lighter mottling, resembling orange bars and a red-ringed spot on the tail and, sometimes, one or two others on the posterior dorsal fin. They prefer still or sluggish weedy-type waters often found along banks of canals.

They have been known to take small jigs, crank baits, spoons, dry flies, wet flies and poppers; basically anything a bass will hit. With oscars' smaller mouths, hooks need to be in proportion. Small minnows under a bobber or just a good ole worm, dangling on a hook, will often provide a rewarding bite.

When fishing with a live bait – minnows, worms or crickets – the first tap you feel is the fish sucking in the bait. The second tap is the fish spitting it out. If you feel a third tap, it's the fish tapping you on the shoulder, asking why you were waiting to set the hook. So be diligent, set the hook and hang on, for oscars deliver quite a bang for their size.

Oscars are classified by the FWC as a "non-game" species meaning there are no size or bag limits. They also are not a catch-and-release species as they are an exotic fish.

When fishing here in Florida, as well as anywhere you hang your hat, remember, good fishing and having fun, that's what it's all about. FW

Gary Anderson works as a freelance writer/photographer and has been published in local papers, Florida Wildlife, North American Fisherman, Associated Content *and various online publications. His Web site is www.theislandanglers.com. He is married, has two sons and a daughter plus a basset hound called Max. Gary has lived and worked in some 35 countries of the world, has two college degrees and calls Florida his home.*

Oscar *Astronotus ocellatus*

Description - Young fish have wavy white and orange markings on a black background. The body and fins of adults are olive, blue-green with mustard highlighting large dark blotches, and a bright red eyespot at the base of the upper caudal fin. The stout body shape is more oval than native bream. Some oscars have orange or red markings and all have a thick mucus coat on the body.

Range – Most abundant in the canals of water conservation areas and Everglades habitats of Collier, western Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties. Oscars occur throughout south Florida, but typically are not as abundant as in marsh-related canals. Their native range includes the Orinoco, La Plata and Amazon river basins in South America.

Habitat – Most successful in canals running through marsh habitats, although they're found in lesser numbers in coastal canals, ponds and lakes in central Florida and southward.

Spawning habits – Spawning normally takes place on flat, solid surfaces when water temperatures warm to 82-91 degrees. Females typically lay about 3,000 eggs, and both parents are occasionally seen guarding hundreds of young in shallow water along shorelines.

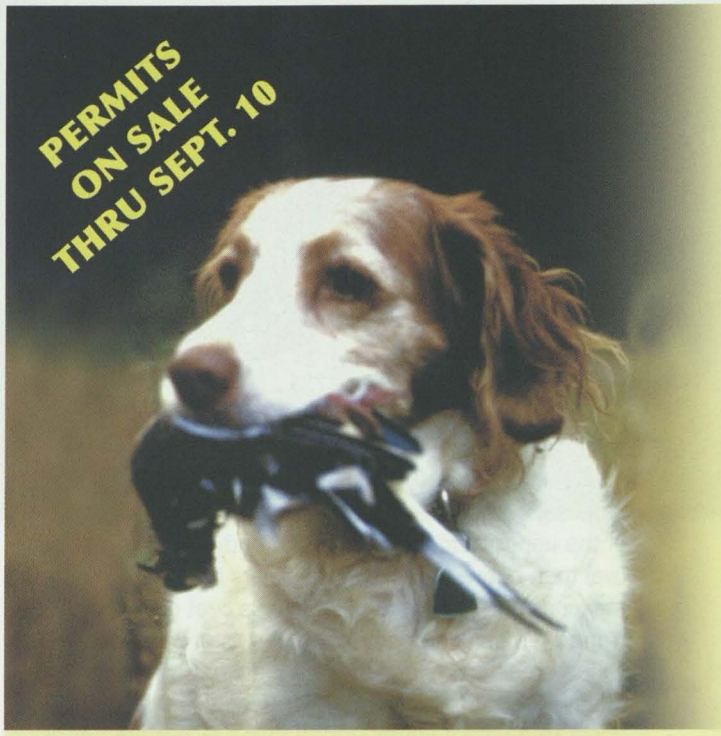
Feeding habits – Oscars feed primarily on small fish, insects, and crustaceans.

Age and growth – 2-pound fish are considered large. The IGFA record, caught in Florida, weighed 3 pounds, 8 ounces. Oscars caught in the Everglades average 10-inches and 12-ounces. Biologists do not know how long oscars typically live.

Sporting quality - Oscars provide a hard-fighting, panfish-type fishery and are especially popular in water conservation areas of south Florida, where they rank second in popularity only to largemouth bass. They'll strike a variety of baits including cut fish, cut shrimp, crickets and worms. The best artificial baits include small jigs tipped with cut bait and small spinnerbaits. Fly-fishing is also productive. The fishery is described as boom and bust fishery since there can be major winterkills, but when abundant, angler catch rates are exceptional. There are no bag or size limits.

Flavor – White, flaky meat with good flavor.

State Record – The record is 2.34 pounds caught in Lake Okeechobee.



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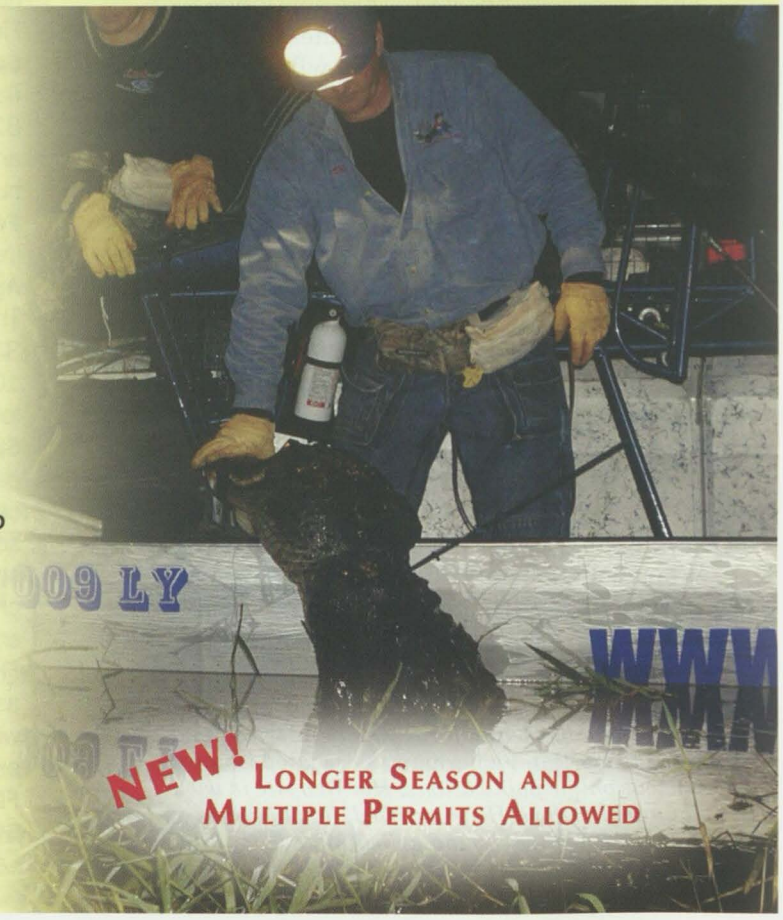


James Randklev

A hog wild hunt

By Damon DeBusk

The morning after I arrived in the South, the temperature was in the upper 20s, not all that different from what I had left back in Pennsylvania.

A friend had invited me down for a wild pig hunt near Madison, on a large parcel of land owned by a paper company. The feral hogs were destroying seedlings and young pines, leaving entire areas rooted up, so they looked like they'd been tilled by a farmer's tractor. We were encouraged to take as many as possible during three days of hunting.

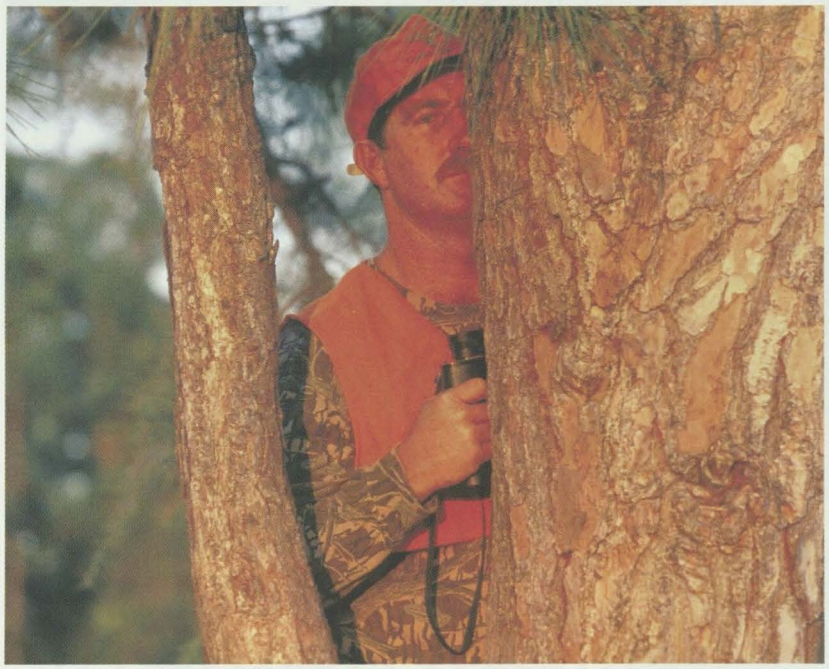
Dr. Roland Lastarza, named after an uncle who fought Rocky Marciano in the early 50s, navigated the logging road that wound its way through the groves of pines. When we reached the drop off point, I hesitantly crawled down from the truck's warm cab and grabbed my gear. For the morning hunt, Roland gave me his best hunting spot, while he would hunt down the road about a half-mile from a second tree stand. He wished me luck and drove off, leaving me standing in total darkness, in wild pig country. I immediately began wondering if this was really such a good idea.

I followed the barely-recognizable path into the woods with only a Browning flashlight to guide me. The small beam of light floated over

the terrain exposing stumps, logs and other tripping hazards conspiring to keep me out. I sloshed my way through ice-skinned puddles, breathing in the earthy smell of pine needles and decaying leaves. As I passed through mazes of thick hedgerows, I imagined Hogzilla's twin brother rustling on the other side. Occasional grunts and yelps in the distance momentarily stopped me in my tracks, but then I quickened my pace. When I reached the tree stand I hauled my gear up the ladder's icy metal rungs, trying not to bang my scope, happy to be off the ground.

The silence thickened as I settled in. Soon, even the slightest sounds were amplified so that a simple cough boomed like a drum, and zipping up my coat sounded a lot like a chainsaw. I sat listening to the wind brush through the treetops, and to the creak of an old pine swaying slowly in the breeze.

No pigs showed those first two days. It didn't matter.



Dusan Smetana/Windigo Images

Occasionally, I felt a pinecone brush past on its fall to the ground. As morning dew fell, I began to shiver, just about the same time I noticed the first wave of light drift to the forest floor. Before long, images began emerging from the darkness.

In the time between dark and light, I imagined the outlines of objects around the tree stand looked like large animals standing motionless, watching me with suspicion. Attempting to focus on the figures only made them harder to see. The morning eventually brightened, revealing these motionless herds as stumps, bushes, oaks and cypress trees. Everything looked differently in the light of day. On the dark rutted soil around the feeder, doves, cardinals and raccoons foraged for breakfast. In nearby trees, crows cawed loudly. I recall jumping when the automatic feeder sprung to life, flinging corn in a 50-foot wide circle.

I was satisfied being in the woods, content watching oak leaves drift silently to the ground and squirrels scurry around stealing corn.

I spent the next two days in the same stand, hunting in the morning and afternoon. During that time the only big game to visit the feeder were does and button bucks. When they emerged from the trees in dark gray winter coats, I watched them for up to 30 minutes at a time as they warily pillaged corn. Eventually, they raised their heads and ears in unison, and disappeared back into the woods in a few bounds, leaving me hoping it was a sign that pigs were nearby.

But no pigs showed those first two days. It didn't matter. I was satisfied being in the woods, content watching oak leaves drift silently to the ground and squirrels scurry around stealing corn. All of the regular work-day stresses were gone; no phone calls, meetings or bosses. I watched as a bobcat passed almost directly beneath the stand on its way to the feeder where it stalked the birds.

By 8:30 in the morning on the final day of the hunt, I was about ready to concede that I would be going home empty-handed. Then, I heard snorting. It sounded like someone doing a bad impression of a pig. I looked behind me, in the direction of the trail, at first expecting to see Roland standing there with a big grin on his face. No one was around. As it occurred to me that my friend would never sneak up on anyone in the woods who was carrying a high-powered rifle, I turned back around in time to see several pigs dart out of the thickets.

They headed straight for the corn that shimmered on the ground like nuggets of gold. My pulse quickened, and I began to shake slightly as I eased the rifle into position, centering the cross hairs of my .270 on the largest black boar. For the next few seconds I watched the animal gobble up corn, allowing me time to get my breathing in check, and hope that Roland would not be early.

As I prepared for the shot, a second pig became visible in my scope. It was another boar rooting in the same area, facing toward my intended quarry. I held my fire. For an excruciating two minutes the two animals inched closer until they were nearly side-by-side. I continued to hold my fire. On the ground, the corn was quickly disappearing. I knew that when Roland arrived, or when the food was gone, the herd would vanish in an instant. Still, I continued to wait until the two animals finally positioned themselves in my line of fire. I took the shot. Both dropped in place. I sat unbelieving in my perch, watching the rest of the herd scatter.

It was not long before Roland appeared and helped me load the two pigs onto his pickup's game rack. When we returned to camp, other hunters came over asking how we had managed to get two animals, especially since there had been only one shot fired in the woods that entire morning. Roland patiently endured hearing me retell the story numerous times to anyone who would listen. For some reason, he has not invited me hunting since. FW

I was about ready to concede that I would be going home empty handed. Then, I heard snorting.

William J. Weber

Hogs – not really native to Florida

By Henry Cabbage

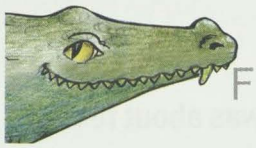
Wild hogs, also known as wild boar, are not really native Florida wildlife. To qualify as native wildlife, a species generally would have to have been here before the European explorers landed here roughly 500 years ago. Hogs are "feral" animals, which means they are domesticated animals that live in the wild.

We probably can thank Hernando DeSoto for introducing hogs to Florida when he arrived here in 1539. Today, feral hogs occur in all 67 counties where they live in disfavor among many landowners while hunters prize them as trophy game. They also serve as an important prey animal for endangered Florida panthers in parts of south Florida.

Hogs move around in groups and cause enormous damage to plants as they root around for food, and they compete with native wildlife for acorns and other food and space. They may even prey on newborn fawns and sea turtle nests, so it is important to control feral hog populations where possible. They grow to five or six feet long and weigh up to 150 pounds.

Florida's climate and other resources offer hogs a variety of habitats where they thrive or at least survive. Hogs' thick layer of fat protects them from many of the perils of living in the wild in Florida. For instance, they have a high tolerance of rattlesnake venom, because the fat layer prevents snakebite venom from reaching blood vessels and nerves. Feral hogs eat rattlesnakes.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission recently voted to expand hog hunting opportunities on some wildlife management areas.
On private lands, hogs – even feral hogs – are classified as livestock, so hunters can take them year-round with no bag limits or size restrictions.



Lake Tiger gator

By Andy Sabol

In relative size to other Florida lakes, Lake Tiger is a tad less than average but by "bass-per-acre," it is a big one!

It was just starting to dark-up when Louis Stans and I cranked the very old 7-1/2 Johnson and pushed our 12-foot aluminum worm tub away from the dock. Bucky, an old man who was part Seminole and part bass, had told us about a certain grass bed located in a little poke-hole cove just about a half-mile northeast of the fish camp.

The poles holding the trot line were just where Bucky said they would be. We cut the motor and kind of oozed up to the weed line.

Fantastic action on Louis' plug. He twitched it once after the circles had gone and it glurked once and then the Dalton Special frogback disappeared tail first into a small whirlpool. At the bottom of the whirlpool was a very angry 3-pound Florida dream. That bass was all mouth and red gills as he came up to boogie about 10 feet from our boat.

Louis slid the bass into our live well and had just poured himself a cup of coffee when it happened. Louis was looking down into his coffee mug when the sound washed over us.

It sounded like a love-sick hippopotamus heaving a deep sigh! Stretched out parallel to our boat was the largest gator I had ever seen in the wild. Longer than our worm tub and about six feet across the back... or so it seemed because he was almost touching the boat!

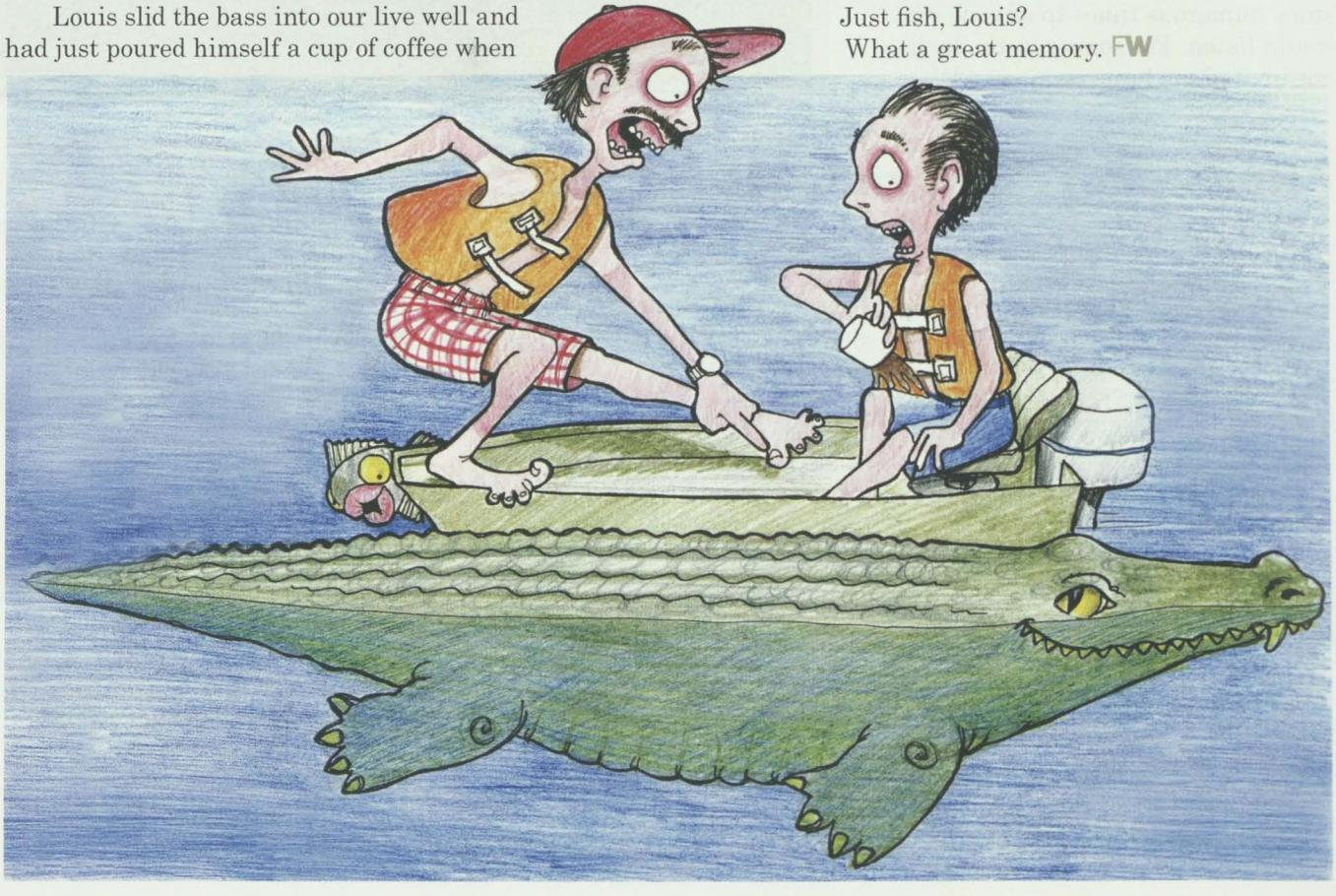
"Good Golly Miss Molly, Louis, look at that!" Louis's eyes came up and out, his coffee mug did a 1-1/2 gainer and the gator dived like a sub evading a triple destroyer attack!

Our little worm tub bobbed like a peanut shell in a rain ditch, and before the water started to settle, Louis was yelling, "Crank the kicker, crank the kicker!"

Since there was no reason to fear a gator, and as we slowed down about a hundred yards away Louis said, "Good thing we moved. That gator probably scared all the fish away."

Just fish, Louis?

What a great memory. FW



John Papesca

Tracks in the sand

By Valli Finney

Michael Patrick O'Neill/Alamy

A leatherback turtle hatchling races across the sand in an effort to reach the ocean.

The behemoths leave their ocean homes, laboring to dig deep into the sand to deposit their treasures, being careful to cover them ever so gently.

They return to the water, following the moonlight reflecting off the gently rolling waves.

In a couple of months, the treasures give forth their bounty. Dozens of hatchling sea turtles begin their struggle to survive, their struggle to reach the water – also guided by the moonlight.

The sea turtle hatchlings face many dangers before they reach the water.

"Lighting is my primary interest as sea turtle nesting season has started," said Richie Moretti, owner of The Turtle Hospital in Marathon in the Florida Keys. "It's really important to turn off lights facing the beaches."

"There's nothing more sad than lights deterring females from nesting, and making the babies go the wrong direction," Moretti said.

Usually, turtles come ashore during the night, deposit their eggs and return to the seas prior to sunrise.

The most common turtle to nest on Florida's beaches is the loggerhead. Leatherback, green, Kemp's ridley and hawksbill sea turtles also may be seen.

But, nothing says they have to follow the rules.

"We've already had a daylight nest, a leatherback, in Miami-Dade County," said Dr. Robbin Trindell, the biological administrator for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Imperiled Species Management Section in Tallahassee.

"That's pretty cool," she said. "People get to see it and they are very respectful of the turtles."

However, light is not good for the turtles which nest along Florida's shores as is evident by a situation in the Keys last year.

Two incidents occurred along U.S. 1 where loggerhead sea turtle hatchlings were attracted by illegal lights and crawled onto the roadway. Several died after being hit by cars. Since hatchlings are so small, the drivers probably didn't even know they had killed the endangered creatures.

Now, black net-type fencing has been installed along a portion of the roadway and the owners of the illegal lights have been notified of the proper procedures to follow.

Netting, Trindell said, can be useful, but should be used only as a last resort.

"First of all, it typically can stop an adult female turtle," she said. "There's an entanglement risk plus the turtles move along it trying to find a way around it."

However, she said, as a last resort, studies show the netting works to keep the babies – and mothers – from crawling into parking lots or roadways.

"It's more of a visual barrier than a physical approach," she said. "We try to modify the tur-

Valli Finney

R and R, a hawksbill sea turtle, rests in his tank at The Turtle Hospital. Hawksbill sea turtles are just one of several which nest in Florida. R and R was bitten by a shark and his flipper had to be amputated.

tles' behavior to try to get them away from potential danger."

And, those dangers are a reason why Moretti would like to see people douse the outdoor lighting in nesting areas.

"Turtles have been around 200 million years," he said. "Incandescent lighting is new to turtles. They go toward light and if they are not in the water before daylight, all the crabs and birds find them very quickly."

And, the fencing used to direct turtles away from dangerous areas, such as roadways, concerns him, too.

"The sad problem is, if the turtles ever got to it, they would be stuck up against the fence," Moretti said.

Trindell agrees the netting could cause problems.

"We want monitoring and someone to do visual inspections every day," she said. "There have to be daily surveys to make sure hatchlings haven't got stuck or lodged against them, and make modifications if necessary."

Trindell offers a better solution than fencing.

"We would really like to see dunes," she said. "We could certainly be involved in recommendations for design for turtle nesting and migratory behavior on and off the beach."

Moretti also wants people to be mindful of nests while driving on beaches where it is allowed. The weight of the vehicle could crush the eggs or trap hatchling turtles in the tire tracks.

Newly hatched turtles are about three times the size of a quarter and they are too small to climb over the "hills and mountains" made by vehicle tires.

Other difficulties turtles face include people leaving beach furniture, toys, towels, boats and garbage on the beach.

The furniture and such can obstruct or entangle turtles, or cause the little ones to detour from their path to reach the water, resulting in mortality.

Eve Haverfield, founder and director of Turtle Time which monitors the Bonita Beach area of Florida, says the beach can be shared by humans and the turtles.

"In the past 16 years or so, I've been very happy with the awareness people have of sea turtle nesting season," she said. However, the educational portion is still a struggle.

"People ask me 'Why do I have to pull my drapes' or 'Why do I have to move my beach chair?'"

Her answer: "We have a responsibility to share the beach with sea turtles. The bottom line is, what's good for the sea turtles is good for humans."

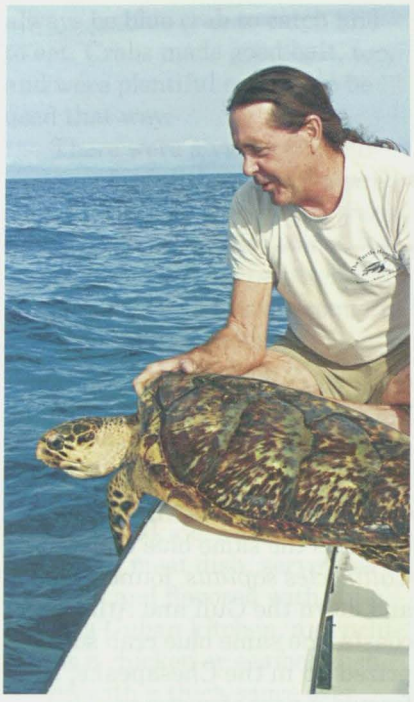
Joe Mitchell, a park service specialist for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) at T.H. Memorial Stone Port St. Joe Peninsula State Park, doesn't have the difficulties of other "turtle people," he says.

The portion of the park where turtles – mostly loggerheads – nest is relatively secluded and humans have to hike about 6 miles through sand and deal with bugs – lots of bugs – to get to it.

Still, he says, a few turtles do nest on the bayside and closer to the main park area, requiring people to be mindful of lights and littering the beach.

Pat Wells, DEP park manager at John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park in Key Largo, doubles as technical adviser to Save-A-Turtle, the Keys' organization which helps with turtle walks and beach cleanings.

Save-A-Turtle began in the 1980s with sponsorship from FWC and DEP. Until Wells



Vaili Finney

Richie Moretti, owner of The Turtle Hospital in Marathon, releases Hope, a hawksbill sea turtle, along the reef. The endangered turtle will live to reproduce.

and former Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (now FWC) Officer Larry Lawrence dreamed of the idea that, yes, the Keys did have nesting turtles, there was no concerted effort to protect the ancient animals or keep the beaches clean.

Every spring, just before nesting season, Wells and volunteers take the time to do a little spring cleaning, preparing a beach for the turtles. And, during that process, Wells has seen a problem Moretti pointed out, garbage hurts turtles by attracting ants.

Even though the ants – especially fire ants – are not a huge problem with nesting turtles and hatchlings, it still remains a problem and one that humans can assist in curtailing.

"I think some of the first documented problems were, strangely enough, in the Marquesas Keys," Wells said. Tom Wilmers with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service noticed predation of sea turtle nests by ants.

Wilmers said since Hurricane Georges hit the islands in 1998, the ants seem, for the most part, to have left the Marquesas area, but he still finds an ant nest now and then.

"From the perspective of a predation problem, it is small in comparison with issues like raccoon predation," Wells said.

All of those involved with sea turtles will say, keep the beach clean. Garbage attracts ants and in turn, ants attack, especially fire ants.

"We've found with turtles, if they get more than three or four ant bites, they usually don't survive," Moretti said. "If two or less, we can usually rehabilitate them. The sad thing that happens is, as soon as the turtles start pipping the eggs, they are welcomed into the world with ants eating their eyes."

But, every turtle person has a cute or unique story to tell about their turtle days.

Leatherbacks seldom roam onto Cape San Blas where Port St. Joe State Park is located, Mitchell said.

One day as he was on "turtle patrol," checking for the signature crawl marks showing a turtle has arrived and laid her bounty, he was shocked to see a certain crawl.

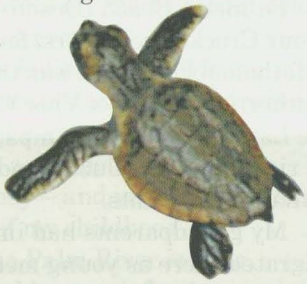
"It looked liked someone drove a Sherman tank on the beach," he said. "I'm like 5-foot 7-inches, and I laid down in the track and I couldn't reach from side to side. When I see something that big, I know it's going to be a leatherback."

Maybe the most poignant story came from Haverfield.

"It still gives me goose bumps when I talk about it today," she said. "About three years ago, a fisherman found a turtle in Pine Island Sound and it had a huge shark hook in it with monofilament hanging out of its mouth." Through surgical intervention, the turtle survived.

"When it was ready for release, we brought it to Bonita. It was a loggerhead, a fairly young one, and as usual the turtle crawled into the water." People who gathered to watch the release were told to wait about 15 seconds and the turtle would pop its head to get a breath then go on into the Gulf of Mexico.

"It came up, took a breath, turned around and stuck its flipper up in the air as if it was waving and then went about its way," she said. "It may not have waved at us, but to us, on the shore, to see it do that made us think he was waving goodbye and thanking us." FW



Tips for sea turtle nesting season now through Oct. 31

- Turn off or properly shade outdoor lights.
- Keep beach chairs, toys, boats and any other item that could entrap or cause turtles to reroute their path off beaches.
- If you see a sea turtle, do not touch or disturb it.
- Never use a flashlight or other light device while on beaches during the night.
- Do not use flash cameras or video lights on the beach.
- Never disturb a sea turtle that appears to be nesting; she could fail to properly cover her nest or become disoriented.
- Many cities and communities have outdoor lighting ordinances. Follow them.
- Anyone spotting injured, ill or disoriented sea turtles should call the FWC at (850) 822-4330 or the Wildlife Alert number at (800) 404-FWCC.

Cooking up a traditional Tampa

crab chilao

By Henry Cordova

The slow and sleepy Palm River emptied into McKay Bay, a little estuary located at the extreme northeast corner of Tampa Bay, as far from the Gulf of Mexico as was possible and still be considered salt water. The famous Seabreeze seafood restaurant and shrimp boat docks were there, and across the road was a drive-in movie. The rest was mangroves and water on the edge of a city.

Palmetto Beach (Desoto Park to our Cracker neighbors, for some unfathomable reason) was the southernmost part of Ybor City, the Latin Quarter of Tampa, with its rich history of Cuban and Italian immigrants.

My grandparents had immigrated there as young men and women in the early 1900s. My mother and father were born there, as was I.

Our roots ran deep in Palmetto Beach. We were Cubans, with the language and culture of that country, but we were Americans too. My grandfather's first job had been working with his wife's brother, a waterman crabbing the waters of McKay Bay. His first house, built on pilings on the water, was blown away by the storm of '29. They found the roof four miles up the Palm River. The rest had vanished, along with everything they owned, but the pilings are still there to this day. My mother's ashes are there too, under the black water, at her request, along with her brother's.

We lived all over Tampa, but we never strayed far from McKay – we had relatives that lived there and we visited often. There was always great food at the Seabreeze and family nights at the drive-in.

The bridge across the estuary was also a favorite destination, and we often went fishing there at night. It was a place where everyone could meet in peace and enjoy the cool breeze off the water and swap advice and tall tales, even if the fish weren't biting and the mosquitoes were.

I still remember the smell of the place – stale bait and fish offal, seaweed and bird droppings, mangroves and mud flats and oysterbars at low tide. But it was not unpleasant; it was the smell of the sea, the smell of life.

The Tampa Bay ecosystem was a great shallow bay fed by many freshwater streams and bordered by thick mangrove forests. The bottom was sand and turtle grass, and supported many fisheries, including the ubiquitous mullet and blue crab.

Even today, after decades of industrial development and phenomenal population growth, the bay supports both commercial and sport fishing on a grand scale. At mid-century, while I was growing up, it was a magical place for wildlife, although I didn't know that at the time.

The blue crab, or jaiba, in the Cuban dialect, was king of the bay. It is the same blue crab, *Callinectes sapidus*, found all up and down the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, the same blue crab so prized up in the Chesapeake. It formed a part of everyone's diet, and it was cheap and easy to get; if you didn't want to pay for it you could always catch your own.

There were so many blue crabs in season that anglers considered them a nuisance. When they were running, you couldn't keep bait on your hook. It didn't matter whether you were fishing on or off the bottom, crabs are strong swimmers and could steal your bait anywhere you put it.

We quickly learned to catch them on hook and line, which is tricky but not impossible. Crabs are wily, but greedy, too. If you reeled one in slowly you could bring it alongside, and if you were fast, you could yank it up into your boat or pier before it realized what was up.

Of course, the scrap was just starting. Crabs are fearless and aggressive fighters, and will defend themselves vigorously. We learned the hard way how to avoid those claws!

We always threw the females back. To this day, I don't know enough about crab reproductive biology to know if this was a valid conservation measure or not, but we did it anyway. It was what we learned from the old-timers, and it was how we ensured there would

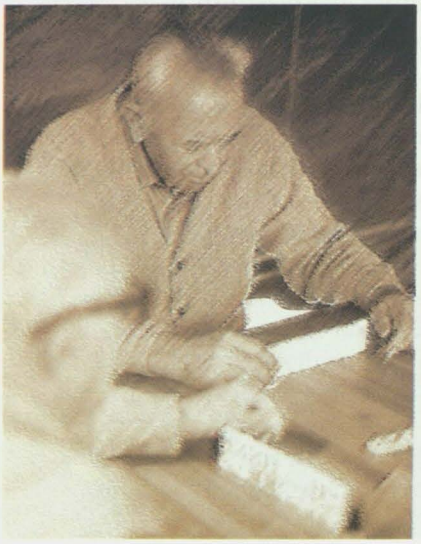
always be blue crab to catch and to eat. Crabs made good bait, too, and were plentiful enough to be used that way.

There were a variety of delicious seafood dishes that featured crab, and croquetas de jaiba were sold at every Ybor City street corner from little carts lettered in Spanish. It was a bite of croquette, a drop of tabasco, a bite of croquette, another drop of sauce.

But I remember best the jaiba enchilada, Tampa's contribution (along with the fine, hand-rolled cigar) to world civilization. Strictly speaking, an enchilada is a Mexican meat dish, served on a tortilla and flavored with chile. But in a Cuban kitchen, an enchilada is a chicken or seafood dish, served with a thick sauce over rice. No chile is involved at all.

Tampa also has a large Italian immigrant community. The Italian tradition of serving seafood over pasta ran strong, and the result was the essential Tampa dish, jaiba enchilada, or spaghetti with crab meat sauce. Our Cracker neighbors honored us with their own quaint pronunciation, crab chilao.

There is no special secret to making the stuff, no guarded recipe, just whip up your best spaghetti sauce and add lots of fresh boiled crab meat. Pour it liberally over No. 8 pasta and you are in business.



Of course, to do it right, the process has to be a bit more elaborate. Making a good chilao was a weekend-long affair, and required the entire extended family.

It would start on a Friday night, when the entire clan gathered at the 22nd Street Causeway in cars, with all their tackle and coolers full of Cuban sandwiches (roast pork, ham and swiss with mayo, mustard and pickles on French bread) and cold beverages.

While the women and youngsters gathered under picnic shelters and prepared the spread, the men would wade out into the bay with lanterns, dip nets and a floating wash tub. The crabs would swim by, attracted by the light, and they'd get scooped up and placed in the tub. The harvest went on late into the night. The leftover ice from the coolers was then packed with the crabs so they'd chill on the ride home.

The next morning, the women would get together and clean the crabs, removing the sweet white meat and throwing it in to simmer in big aluminum kettles of tomato sauce. Usually, it wasn't just crab meat. Included would be a collection of meatballs, Italian and Spanish sausage, sometimes even an entire pork chop or two – anything that was in the kitchen.

The men would play dominoes, smoke cigars, and drink demitasse coffee. By evening, the sauce was ready, and the aluminum pots, sealed with tinfoil, went into the refrigerator to cure overnight.

Sunday afternoon, well after lunch, the family gathered, the coffee and the dominoes were put away and the sauce, after simmering over a slow flame all morning long, was ceremoniously poured over steaming white noodles. Dinner was served.

I left Tampa after college, spent a hitch in the Navy, worked overseas for a year, and then lived for decades up north and out west. I eventually moved back to the Sunshine State and go to Tampa

once or twice a year, on business or to visit old friends as my family has mostly passed on.

Tampa's changed a great deal over the years, although in many ways I'm amazed how little has changed. I can still get a decent plate of crab chilao, although I have to look for it now, and it's never as good Mom's.

I usually try to make it into town over the causeway – the bridge is new, but it's in the same place as the old one. The Seabreeze and the drive-in are gone.

Stopping in Palmetto Beach for a moment, I look at the water that covers my mother's and Uncle Manny's graves.

It's fading now, but sometimes, if the time, tide and wind are just right, I take a deep breath and smell the bay, the same bay – and yet not the same bay – of my childhood.

The Palm River is gone, replaced by a new flood control canal. Many of the same houses were there when I was a kid and are more than a century old now.

On the pilings where my mother's place used to be, a small seafood wholesaler has built a pier and shack where his mullet skiffs and crab boats tie up. Off in McKay Bay, I see the floats of crab traps. Blue crab continue to live in the bay. FW

Destinations

Catfish abound at Newnan's Lake

By Carolee Anita Boyles

Billy/Lindner/Windigo Images

Mention Gainesville, and talk tends to turn to the University of Florida and the Florida Gators football team. But anglers "in the know" know there's some great fishing just 4 miles and a few minutes east of downtown Gainesville.

For many years, Newnan's Lake was billed as one of the state's top lakes for bass, both largemouth and sunshine, as well as for catfish. But with the past few years' prolonged drought, conditions in the lake have changed, making it less of a bass lake and more of a catfish fishery.

At full pool, Newnan's Lake is between 5,800 and 6,700 acres. It is surrounded by cypress trees; angling can be good in the trees when the water is high. You'll find a few areas of emergent plants – grasses, bulrush and spatterdock – around the lake's edges. The lake is designated as a Fish Management Area by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

Newnan's Lake is a natural lake, and is actually a big cypress dome. In many ways, it's unique in the area; for a variety of reasons it's maintained a great deal of its integrity as a natural resource.

Eric Nagid is a fisheries biologist with the FWC whose responsibilities include Newnan's Lake.

"There's not a lot of development on the lake itself," Nagid says. "There's a road along the west shore of the lake, but none of the houses along the road are right on the lake – they're on the other side of the road. So there are some docks that people have placed in the lake, but the cypress that borders the lake is still there."

Much of the land north of Newnan's Lake is swamp, and by coincidence or design, the St. Johns Water Management District has purchased much of that property. As a result, the two main streams that feed the lake – Hatchet Creek and Little Hatchet Creek – have been protected from pollution and nutrient loading that would degrade the lake.

Behind the cypress stand in the lake itself, Nagid says, are many pine stands, mostly owned by timber companies. This, too, has protected the watershed.

Like other cypress lakes, Newnan's Lake is quite shallow.

"At normal pool, Newnan's has a mean depth of about 1.5 meters, or about 4 feet," Nagid says. "There are a couple of holes, one off Palm Point and one in kind of the north central part of the lake, that at normal water level are about 10 feet deep."

Nagid says paleolimnology studies – studies that take bottom samples and date them – have shown that Newnan's Lake is somewhere between 5,000 and 8,000 years old. Throughout that time, the lake has been naturally eutrophic, meaning that it has a lot of nutrients in both the water and the bottom sediments. This is reflected in the state of the bottom, which is soft and mucky for a depth of several feet.

"The bottom is extremely unconsolidated," Nagid says bluntly. "Because it's such a nutrient-rich lake, it's very, very mucky. There's an 8-foot average depth of muck, and as much as 16 feet in some places. That represents years and years of sediment accumulation, most of it associated with algal and plant remains. Back in the 1950s, Newnan's Lake was plagued with a lot of water hyacinths, and intensive herbicide treatments were done." Both the dead hyacinths and naturally occurring algae have contributed to the muck layer, Nagid says.

Eric Nagid

According to Gary Simpson at The Tackle Box – located next to Powers Park on the southwest side of the lake off State Road 20 – the lake was stocked with bass late in the spring of the year. By now, those young fish are large enough that bass fishing has improved. Additionally, the black crappie and bream populations are rebuilding to good fisheries. However, if you plan to fish Newnan's Lake, it's worth a telephone call first to find out whether you can get into the lake on the regularly maintained boat ramps. If the water is up, you also can fish from a pier at Powers Park.

During periods of low water, many anglers put in at Palm Point, a small point of land on the southeast side of the lake on County Road 329B between State Road 20 and State Road 26.

"Palm Point is a natural point that extends out into the lake a little bit," Nagid. "There's a dirt area there that is cleared out and there's a little bit of lime rock there where people can put in, even though it's not a developed ramp."

Palm Point also is a natural place for bank anglers to fish, Nagid says.

"You can cast out to the Palm Point hole, one of the 10-foot holes," he says. "So it's always been a highly-used area."

If you're fishing for catfish on Newnan's Lake, expect to catch white catfish, brown bullheads and yellow bullheads. Nagid says most of them will be in the 6- to 12-inch range, perfect for eating.

"It's always been a really good lake for catfish," he says.

All the traditional catfish baits should work well on the lake.

"Anglers use mud minnows, grass shrimp, earthworms, chicken livers; any kind of bait like that works well," Nagid says.

Whether you're bank fishing or fishing from a canoe or johnboat, Nagid offers one caution: don't wade or swim in Newnan's Lake. Part of the reason is the soft bottom.

"When you step into that stuff, you can literally sink," he says. "It's not a lake you want to be out swimming in."

Beyond the state of the bottom, however, watch out for the alligators.

"Newnan's Lake has always had a pretty good alligator population," Nagid says. "It's always been a good place for big and plentiful gators."

Newnan's Lake is easy to find. Take State Road 20 east from Gainesville about four miles. You can turn left on County Road 329B to reach Palm Point, or just past CR 329B turn left into Powers Park next to the Tackle Box.

Alternatively, take State Road 26 east from the northern part of Gainesville. About three miles from town, SR 26 bears to the left; stay on County Road 329B straight ahead. If you follow it, it also will take you to Palm Point. FW

Eric Nagid

Above: An aerial view of Palm Point during the drought illustrates the shallowness of Newnan's Lake. The prolonged drought has made it more of a catfish fishery rather than a bass lake. **Left:** Shoreline vegetation such as American lotus thrives as the lake returns to normal water levels.

Give Mother Nature a helping hand. . .

and save property, habitat and critters

Article and photographs by Valli Finney

The snake slithered across the pristine white sand, moving through the dunes in search of its next meal. Birds became skittish, flying away. Green anoles blended into the bushes.

The coachwhip, a native Florida snake, was in its prime habitat – a wide variety of native plant life and the majestic sand dunes of T.H. Stone Memorial Port St. Joe Peninsula State Park. Here, in its native habitat, it can find dinner, a mouse, lizard or bird hiding among the vegetation.

The dunes protected the coachwhip and other native animals' habitat from destruction during the many hurricanes that impacted Florida the previous two years. The dunes did what they were designed – by Mother Nature – to do: hold back the storm surge and wave action which eats away at them.

The vegetation remains lush, albeit a little scarred in some areas. Yes, some sand was lost, redeposited elsewhere, but the dunes still rise about 40 feet above the beach.

Unfortunately, many other parts of the state were not spared the destructive force of the storms.

Humans have done much over the years to disrupt the natural process, resulting in loss of animal habitat and causing property damage to escalate.

One scientist says critters and plant-life have been around for years, millenniums even, and a hurricane shouldn't wipe out a species.

"Every native species on this landscape has experienced hundreds of hurricanes through its evolutionary history," said Dr. Win Everham, an associate professor of marine and ecological sciences at Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers who has researched hurricane impacts on habitat. "I try to make the case that if you accept we've had the same climate for at least 5,000 to 6,000 years, anything that can be wiped out by a hurricane has been wiped out."

All the rest adapt to whatever changes Mother Nature has thrown at them.

"There could be 100 percent mortality within the area hit by a hurricane, but as long as the species has a population outside the hurricane, it can reinvade," he said. "It is certainly possible a hurricane can cause extinction, but they (different species) have persisted over the years."

Natural protection

One difficulty Everham sees is the increase in disturbances – human impacts such as rip rap or seawalls or planting of non-native species – to the features Mother Nature intended. The dunes and native plants protect the shoreline and habitat, allowing Florida's native animals to survive and recover.

"And if some of that change is a result of our actions, I sometimes think the ethical response is to repair (the land) in a nurturing way," he said. "I can't say 'let nature takes it course.'"

Michael Shirley, research director at Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Center on Florida's gulf coast, agrees.

"As we looked at some of the natural beach dune areas, there was a lot of erosion of the coastal areas," he said. "The benefit of native vegetation is that it is not only going to be better at tolerating the extremes, but it tends to respond to shifting sand.

"It certainly makes a lot of sense to have a natural dune line to save property," Shirley said. "It's all dependant on how big the storm is, what the impacts are going to be and whether it's a rain or wind producer."

Shirley points out one fact: catastrophic storms are a rarity, and nothing can stop them.

Foam clings to seagrass as the tide moves in recently at T.H. Stone Memorial Port St. Joe Peninsula State Park. A few hours later, the seagrass was under water.

"In the case of a catastrophic storm, nothing will hold the sand together," he said.

But, in smaller storms or ones that don't have a large, high storm surge, the dunes do protect property and habitat for wildlife.

"Look at the effects," Shirley says. "Places that have native plant landscaping or dunes tend to fare better than places where they have seawalls."

Restoring native habitat

One way of assisting is to restore the native plant habitat so creatures have a place to go, increasing the likelihood of survival for the variety of species in that particular ecosystem.

Everham says that could mean introducing habitat extirpated from other areas of Florida, to diversify it and reintroduce the species into historically appropriate areas.

Hurricanes have a far greater impact than just what we can immediately see.

Sometimes, storm surge – saltwater – causes damage, especially along the shoreline and just inshore, to plants which provide habitat for animals. That damage may not be readily apparent. It could take days or even a few weeks to notice. By then, the saltwater intrusion into the plant's roots is so bad, the specimen dies.

"Or you might get a place where you get a salt turn, a different kind of habitat," Everham said.

Human impacts

"We have to start thinking about how much of that happens because of what we have done," Everham said. "Historically, the system could have flushed, but (we've) altered hydrology."

One way to keep the die-off from occurring is to saturate the area around the plants with fresh water as soon as possible.

Shirley says one of the biggest problems with hurricanes is human influence on the rise of sea levels.

Mangroves, which provide some protection against erosion and help build land, grew when the sea level was much less than it is now, he said.

Lose the rake

Everham has a suggestion on how to save the coastline and animal habitat.

"Don't rake your beach," he says. "That's been a way some people have managed beaches. They think the rackline is ugly, but it's part of the natural process for dune systems.

"Raking the beach means you're not getting as many sea oats, sea grapes and other native plants to stabilize the dunes," Everham says. "You've got a bare beach. Part of the long-term survivability is natural vegetation.

Go native

"I would say replant and, of course, given time, you would expect to the system to repair itself," Everham said.

Shirley agrees.

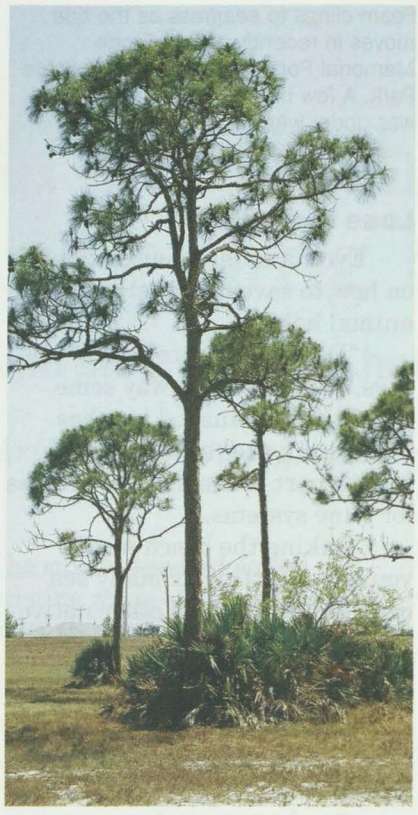
"The benefit of native vegetation is, not only is it going to be better tolerating the extremes, but it tends to respond to shifting sand," Shirley said. "Going with native species is cost-effective and people should go with something likely to last out there."

Snakes

Everham, who teaches budding environmental scientists about ecosystems, is himself an animal lover, especially when it comes to reptiles.

"Snakes are probably underutilized," he said. "A lot of what we are doing is fragmenting their habitat and they don't have the reproductive capacity of other animals."

So, when a hurricane hits the habitat where native snakes live and breed, they could be adversely affected, which could cause a breakdown in the ecosystem.



Palmetto grows underneath slash pines, providing shelter and food sources for animals.

Invasive plants

Helping replenish the landscape, though, must be approached with caution. Some plants are very invasive and take over where native plants live.

"A lot of invasive exotics are successful," Everham says. "They are highly reproductive. There's the danger now of having a place destroyed by hurricanes being taken over by exotics, like the Old World climbing fern. It got into these places where (tree) canopy had been ripped up, allowing it to grow faster and squeeze out natives."

And, exotics such as Australian pines – which are not conifers at all – blow over easily in hurricanes because of a very shallow root system, causing damage and possible problems with evacuation routes. They inhibit other native plant growth because of their needles, and don't provide suitable habitat for birds or reptiles. And, the root system doesn't allow sea turtles to nest and has been known to entrap them.

Sanibel and Captiva Islands experienced what happens when Australian pines cannot stand up to a storm's fury. Trees blocked Sanibel-Captiva Road, precluding people from getting to their houses for days after Hurricane Charley in 2004.

Another invasive plant is Brazilian pepper. It can take over an area easily and, because it is low growing, the wind goes over it.

"If you can picture a stand of pine which has a dense understory of Brazilian pepper and the overstory pines are wiped out, they are not able to regenerate and boom, you have a field of pepper," Everham says.

"That's another reason we can't just let nature repair itself because we have introduced so many plants which are invasive exotics."

Leave them natural

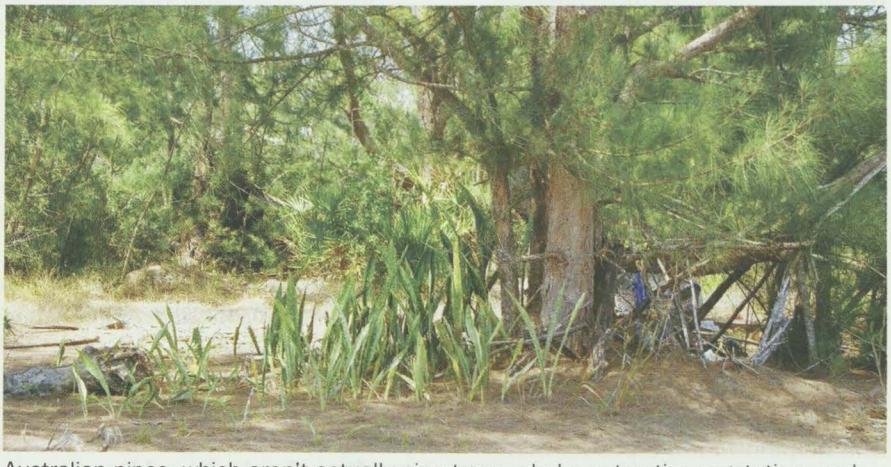
Many people say they've seen native plants fall victim to hurricanes – even minimal ones, so why bother going native?

Everham responds to those questions by saying unfortunately, people have a tendency to over-fertilize plants and over-water native plants and trees, not allowing them to establish themselves and establish a good root system.

"We make it too easy on them," Everham says. "Don't support them too hard. Let them get a good root system on their own because that's what helps them survive a storm."

People also like to see the perfect tree and, if a limb falls off during a storm, they have a tendency to destroy the whole tree because it's no longer that Darwinian-perfect specimen.

"If a hurricane has pruned your tree, let it look different," Everham says. "There's some beauty in saying, 'It's beautiful because Hurricane Charley took part of it.' Everything doesn't have to look beautiful." FW



Australian pines, which aren't actually pine trees, choke out native vegetation, and allow invasive species such as mother-in-law tongue (above) and Brazilian pepper to thrive.

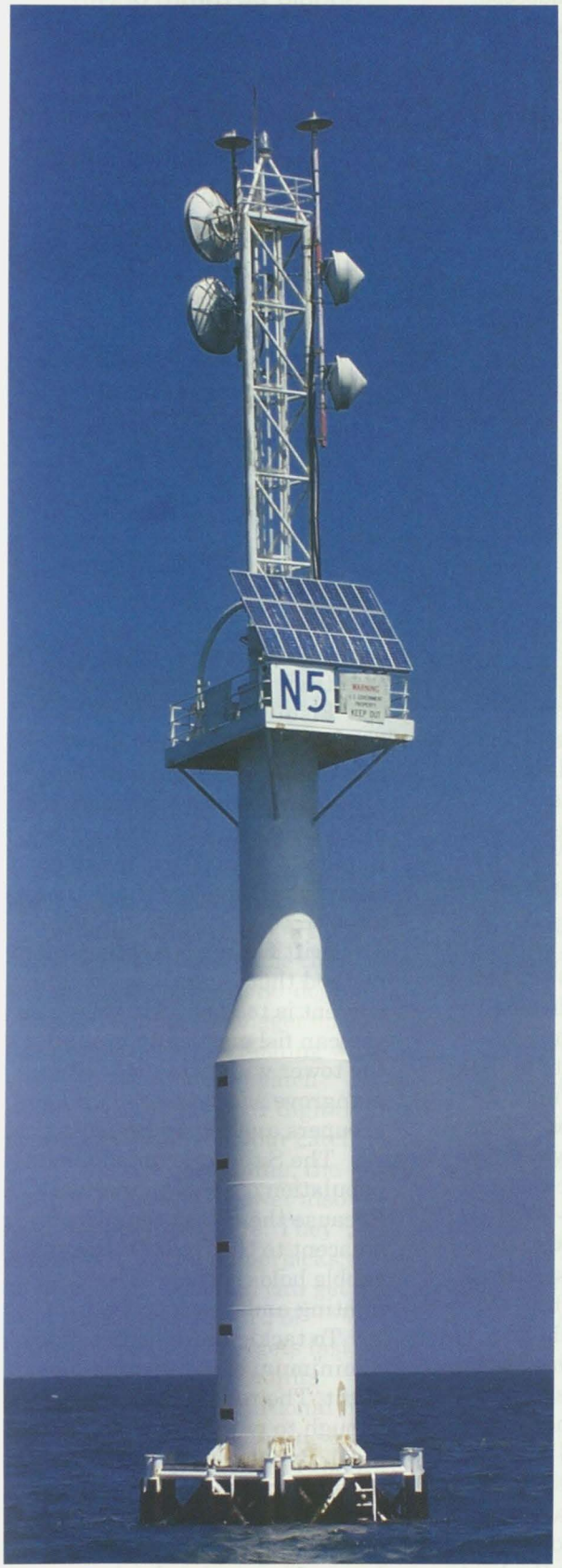
Editor's Note

This is the first of a three-part series on hurricane impacts on the environment, resulting in a loss of habitat for native animals.

The second part focuses on what happens to hunting, fishing and oyster beds after a hurricane impacts an area.

In the third and final installment, scientists discuss what types of plants to plant to help provide protection and suitable habitat for Florida's native species.

Alphabet towers



S tower is one of several Air Force towers that are proven "fish magnets."

Learn the A, B, Cs

Article and photographs by Capt. Alex Crawford

In the Gulf of Mexico, off the shores of Carrabelle and Apalachicola, are five U.S. Air Force training towers. These 100-foot-tall, gleaming white cylinders are giant fish magnets which provide excellent recreational fishing opportunities. They are known as alphabet towers, due to their letter designations, C, K, O, S and V.

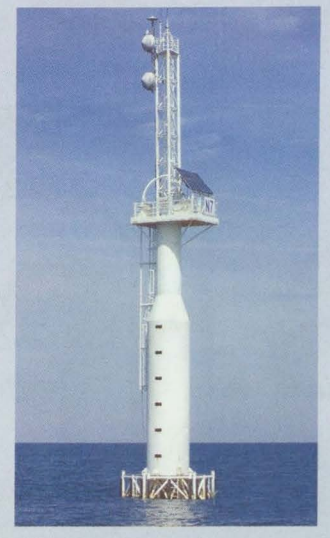
Most of the towers were built in 1977 to create a "range" for Air Force training. According to Lt. Will Powell from the Tyndall Air Force Base Public Affairs office and Skip Sanders, functional director of the Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation office (ACMI), they are tracking towers for the Air Combat Training System. During training maneuvers, the towers are used to get a realistic picture of exactly where the jets are in the airspace.

The natural floor of the Gulf of Mexico is flat with no structure for miles and miles, offering small ocean creatures nothing to eat and no place to hide. The towers, never intended to affect the Gulf's fish population, have become artificial reefs. Large schools of bait fish are attracted to the towers and provide a consistent food source for ocean pelagics like cobia, king mackerel, tuna and wahoo, as well as prized bottom-species like snappers and groupers.

It is not uncommon to see large schools of bait, often cigar minnows and blue runners, holding tight at the

Tower locations

with GPS coordinates



K tower is south of Alligator Point.

K tower sits in about 60 feet of water, about 14 nm south of Alligator Point.
29 39 990
84 22 205

C tower depth about 80 feet, 12 nm southeast of the Government Cut
29 24 750
84 51 380

V tower about 85 feet deep, around 34 nm south of Alligator Point
29 24 907
84 20 717

S tower about 106 feet depth, 33 miles southeast of the Government Cut
29 17 906
84 36 950

O tower, located about 20 miles south of Dog Island
29 32 306
84 37 036

All of the above information can be found on charts available in the public domain.

surface on the down-current side. If you can capture these baitfish, your chance of angling success increases greatly. It is almost impossible to throw a cast net on the bait because of the water clarity and depth, but sabiki rigs will catch some prime bait.

On a 20-pound-class spinning outfit, tie a size eight, high quality sabiki rig. To keep your rig from becoming hopelessly entangled, especially with five hardtail jacks speeding off in every direction, clip off two or three of the gold hook quills. You have effectively created two sabiki rigs for the price of one.

Tip the small gold hooks with tiny pieces of squid tentacles to spice them up a bit. On the bottom of the rig attach at least an 8-ounce bank sinker. A heavier sinker may be necessary with a stronger horizontal current. The idea is to drop the sabiki rig down to where the bait is and to pull it away from the steel cutoffs around the tower. Small groupers, snappers, triggers and spadefish will occasionally bite and a 20-pound spinner gives you a chance to save your sabiki rig.

Treat your live bait with care so they are uninjured when you remove them from the live bait well. A small pair of surgical stainless steel hemostats makes a perfect tool for removing those tiny hooks. Investing extra time to acquire good bait always pays off in a higher-quality catch.

If you are an early-bird angler, approach the tower from the upwind/upcurrent side with your boat's motor off. The designated angler should be positioned as high as possible on the boat as is safe. This allows for a perfect cast to a monster cobia that is holding on the shady (west) side. A good choice for this opportunity is a 4-ounce white cobia jig. Upon hookup, the wheel man should back the boat away so the fish can't get into the steel. This is sometimes easier said than done.

All hands on board should be aware of two safety issues. First, wear your life jacket, so if you accidentally go overboard during the adrenalin rush, you can be brought back in the boat. Secondly, know where your hook is at all times. Hooks bouncing and blowing around in the cockpit may accidentally find a body part. This can spoil a great fishing day and is just plain dangerous.

Fishing the towers gives you several options to land quality fish. Trolling around with large lures can produce big kingfish or grouper. Mann's Stretch lures, Rapalas and Yo Zuris make good offerings when slow-trolled near a tower.

Drift fishing is another method that works – unless the current is too fast. Anchoring so you can fish vertically around the tower will yield nice red and mangrove snappers, red and gag groupers and big amberjacks.

The S tower is noted for its population of large amberjacks. Because the Exxon template is adjacent to the S tower, the steel rubble holds schools of hard-fighting amberjacks.

To tackle these brutes, use a minimum of a 30-pound-class outfit. The rod must be strong enough to pull fish up out of the steel. By far, the very best baits for amberjacks are big ocean pinfish, with hardtail jacks a close second. Sharp circle hooks and heavy fluorocarbon leaders are necessary. Amberjacks feed up in

John and Jennifer Humes proudly hold the pretty cobia they caught.

the water column, so be prepared to chunk-bait the amberjacks up and be ready to pitch bait on a stout rig to a specific target.

Smaller amberjacks are much better on the dinner table than the really big ones. In 80-degree summer waters, the bigger ones are prone to worms. Fishing with circle hooks allows for catch-and-release. Bring your digital camera to document your catch.

If you are chumming, the template and the S tower also hold big gray snappers. They come up with the amberjacks, so be ready, the action can get wild really fast. A word of caution – when a bite gets fast and furious, rational adults sometimes become irrational in their excitement of catching a big fish. They see the fish and their buddies getting hooked up with the speed of greased lightning.

There are some really nice bottom fish around the towers. If you catch cigar minnows for bait, send them down to the base of the tower and have your fighting belt adjusted and at the ready. Sow red snappers and big gags are catchable, especially on good live bait.

Because you are fishing around steel, rocks and concrete, expect to break off a few rigs. A prepared Captain will have leaders pre-tied and at the ready to minimize downtime. Stow leaders individually in zippered plastic baggies, so they are easily accessible and ready to fish.

Fishing on the alphabet towers is a fun and challenging offshore experience. Never try to tie up to the towers; it is illegal and may smash you boat. Don't crowd any maintenance crews that are working on a tower. Use common sense, have loads of fun and catch quality fish. FW

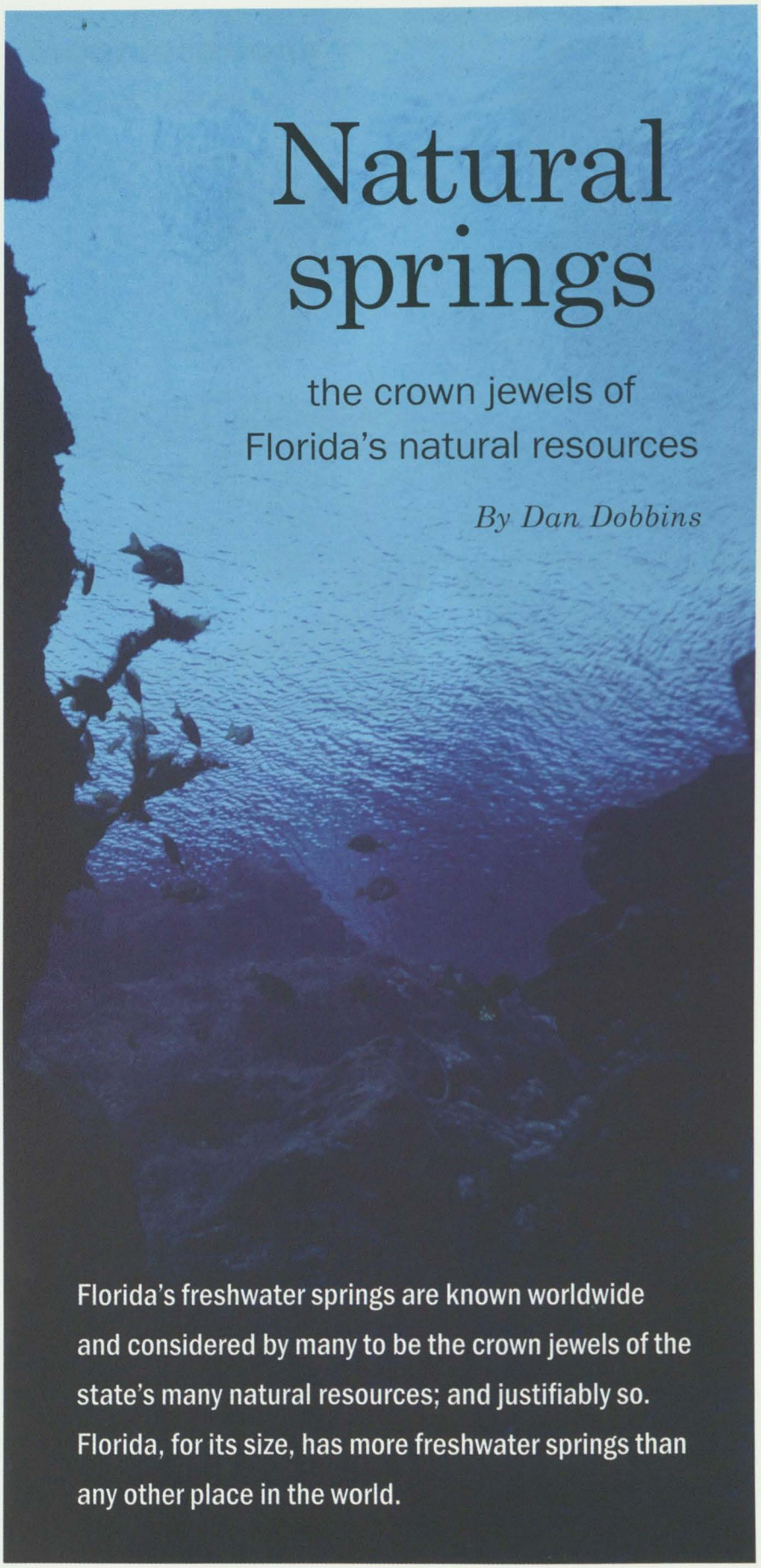
Years ago, we didn't keep amberjacks because they were considered oily and heavily flavored. Today, they are found everywhere on the finest seafood restaurant menus. We especially like chargrilled amberjack. Simply marinate the fillets in Italian dressing and refrigerate, cook on a grill for 10 minutes per side, based on thickness, until they're flakey. Serve with your favorite beverage and invite your fishing friends.

Captain Alex Crawford is a proud member of the Florida Outdoor Writers Association, Florida Guides Association and the Coastal Conservation Association. He can be reached at (850) 697- 8946 or visit www.topknots.com.

Natural springs

the crown jewels of Florida's natural resources

By Dan Dobbins



Florida's freshwater springs are known worldwide and considered by many to be the crown jewels of the state's many natural resources; and justifiably so. Florida, for its size, has more freshwater springs than any other place in the world.

Doug Stamm

Freshwater springs are as synonymous with Florida as sunshine. Native Americans depended on them for food, water and a means of transportation for more than 10,000 years before the first Europeans set foot in North America. Spanish explorers were amazed by their beauty and size. Early American pioneers found them to their liking and established settlements around them. By the late 1800s they were Florida's first tourist attractions, complete with glass bottomed boats. Luxury hotels and health spas sprouted around them as thousands of wealthy northerners flocked south to partake of their health benefits, both real and perceived. Many of the early Tarzan movies, as well as "Creature from the Black Lagoon" were filmed at them. Today they inspire awe, wonder and imagination in millions of visitors every year.

Florida's freshwater springs are known worldwide and considered by many to be the crown jewels of the state's many natural resources; and justifiably so. Florida, for its size, has more freshwater springs than any other place in the world. From small "boils" a person can easily step across, to giants like Wakulla and Silver springs that pump out enough water to form their own rivers, freshwater springs dot Florida's landscape from one end of the state to the other. On any given day, some eight to nine billion gallons of mostly cool, crystal-clear water will flow from more than 700 known springs in the state.

Springs are generally classified by their discharge which is determined by such factors as the size of the spring opening, water pressure and the permeability and porosity of the limestone itself. A first-magnitude spring, the largest, produces a flow of at least 65 million gallons of water a day. Florida has 33 first-magnitude springs, well over a third of the total number found in the United States.

Image provided by VISIT FLORIDA

Florida's natural springs provide ample recreational opportunities.

Doug Stamm

Manatees feed on abundant aquatic vegetation in spring-fed rivers and depend on their constant temperature to survive through the winter.

A submarine spring, one of 16 known in Florida, located just offshore of Spring Creek, is the largest spring in the world, discharging well over a billion gallons of water a day.

Florida owes its abundance of freshwater springs to the presence of the Floridan aquifer, a thick layer of limestone and dolomite underlying the entire state and extending into southern Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina. It is one of the most productive aquifers in the world and is the principal supply source for most of the state.

More like a giant sponge than solid rock, the Floridan is riddled with caverns, tunnels and crevices, which serve as conduits through which immense volumes of water continuously move. Springs occur when rainwater percolating downward puts pressure on water already in the aquifer and forces some to the surface through natural openings. Since the Floridan lies closest to the surface in the northern portion of the state, it is here most springs occur, typically along rivers and the west coast.

Springs are important contributors to the flow of virtually every river in the state. The Suwannee River, with nine first-magnitude springs and many smaller ones, derives much of its flow from springs. Rivers such as the Wakulla, Silver and Wacissa are totally dependent on springs for their very existence.

Springs enthrall us. They are exquisitely beautiful to look at and a godsend to be in on a scorching summer's day. They are mysterious in their being, yet soothingly familiar at the same time. Springs are also a very important part of Florida's complex ecology.

Spring ecosystems are among the most productive and diverse in the world and support a vast array of life. Numerous species of snails living in Florida springs exist nowhere else in the world. Hundreds of manatees feed on abundant aquatic vegetation in spring-fed rivers and depend on their constant temperature to survive through the winter. The limpkin, one of Florida's rarest birds, is found in the spring-formed rivers and swamps as is its prey, the apple snail. So too, are wading birds, otters and alligators.

Springs are something of a paradox. Gazing into one is like watching a living tapestry; always moving, ever-changing. Predators stalk prey, snails graze on algae-covered plants and turtles bask in warm sunlight. Vast arrays of living organisms go about their daily activities, playing out their roles.

Yet, while the scene appears fresh and original to the viewer, it is simply a variation of one that has been replayed endlessly over thousands of years. One that started long before man arrived and is constantly renewed by a never-ending flow of water.

Throughout most of man's time in Florida, he had little or no impact on its many springs. Unfortunately for the springs, this had far more to do with his numbers than anything else.

Archaeologists estimate there were approximately 350,000 Native Americans living in Florida when the first Spanish explorers landed. Well over four centuries passed before Florida's human population tallied one million individuals.

The years prior to World War II marked the beginning of the greatest population boom in Florida's history. Cheap land, a warm climate and dreams combined to lure millions to a state known mainly for alligators, swamps and mosquitoes. Today, more than 17

million people call Florida home, and with a population growth rate double the national average, the boom is far from over. Florida has also become one of the world's greatest tourism destinations, drawing millions of visitors every year.

The Florida the Native Americans and early pioneers knew is gone, transformed forever by the unrelenting pressures of a rising sea of humanity. Condominiums tower where mangroves once grew while isolated stands of cypress and longleaf pine exist where once stood seemingly endless forests. Numerous species of wildlife are extinct or endangered and the once mighty Everglades, the "river of grass" struggles to survive.

Florida's springs have not been spared the impacts of the state's mushrooming human population. Flow rates at a number of springs are well below their historical average and some no longer flow at all. At others the water flowing from them is no longer the pure crystal-clear water our ancestors knew.

High nitrate levels, an indication of groundwater contamination, have been found at an increasing number of springs, including two of Florida's most famous first-magnitude springs, the Chassahowitzka complex and Wakulla Springs. Water discharged from the latter is often so murky that the glass-bottom boat tours don't run for days at a time. The limpkin, once a common sight at Wakulla Springs, is seldom seen anymore and hydrilla, an exotic underwater plant, chokes the springs and river.

While much of natural Florida has been lost or changed, much still remains. For several decades, Florida has had the largest land acquisition programs in the nation, spending hundreds of millions of dollars annually to preserve the finest examples of natural Florida. From world-renowned beaches to rare upland scrub habitat, millions of acres have been brought under state protection. In addition, a number of counties have established their own greenspace preservation programs.

Florida's springs have benefited greatly from these programs both through direct acquisition and the purchase of watershed basins. More than a dozen of Florida's state parks and preserves derive their names from the springs found within their boundaries. In addition, the Florida Springs Initiative was implemented in 2000 to develop a comprehensive spring protection effort.

Floridians have demonstrated an unquestionable love of their springs and a commitment to their protection and preservation. However, the challenge ahead is a daunting one. On average, 2,000 people live on every square mile of the state and the number grows daily. Every day, billions of gallons of water are pumped out of the Floridan aquifer to satisfy needs ranging from crop irrigation to drinking water. And, every day, groundwater levels and spring flows drop. Complicating matters, is that much of the water replenishing the aquifer contains a wide range of contaminates. Many are filtered out, but some eventually cycle back to the surface into springs or drinking-water supplies.

Water is a precious commodity in Florida and will become increasingly so in the years ahead. Florida's springs represent far more than the jewels in its crown of natural resources. They are a microcosm of a complex and fragile ecosystem – a legacy from the past, a window to the future and a canary in the mineshaft. FW

Spring ecosystems are among the most productive and diverse in the world and support a vast array of life.

Dan Dobbins

Prairie Creek memories

By Coleman and Tom Stokes

The human memory is unique in that it holds images that are different for everyone, even when recalling the same incidents. In this memoir, father and son offer recollections of an adventure from the early days of Florida fishing. The father's comments are printed in italic.

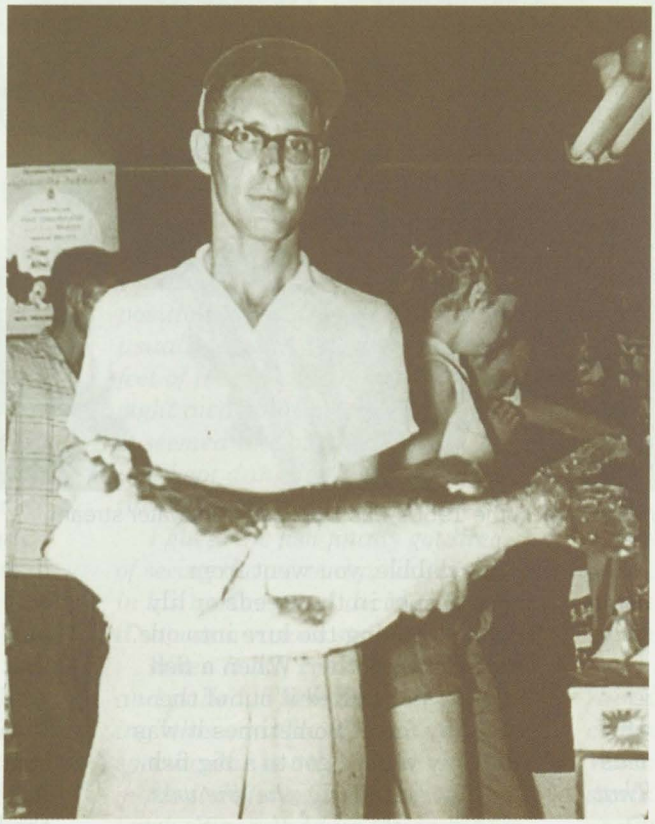
Prairie Creek flows from the body of Newnan's Lake, diverting excess water into Paine's Prairie, a wildlife sanctuary just south of Gainesville. In the 1950s, Prairie Creek was a deep, pristine blackwater stream flowing around Spanish moss-covered cypress trees.

Cypress knees, part of the trees' root system, jutted out of the water. There were also muddy spots, sandy banks and a railroad trestle that spanned the creek, providing cover for all manner of freshwater fish.

Most of this is on the mark, but Prairie Creek was not as big as you remember. In most places, it was narrow enough to cast to the other side and was only deep in a few places. There were wide and shallow spots downstream where you could actually wade across.

To a 9-year-old boy, Prairie Creek was paradise, with enough snakes, snapping turtles, mosquitoes, ticks and chiggers to serve as reminders of the rawness of nature. The thick forest on both sides of the creek provided shelter for deer, turtles, frogs, cottonmouths, otters, owls, squirrels, buzzards and wild hogs. Cattle grazed on some of adjacent property. I don't remember ever seeing an alligator in the creek.

One day while fishing, I heard a commotion from the other side of the creek. A hawk had caught a squirrel sunning atop a huge cypress tree and both were falling through the branches. The squirrel dropped to the ground and then scampered right back up the same tree. Prairie Creek then returned to its usual quiet and peace. The whole scene took less than a minute but stands out in my memory.



Tom Stokes holds the 9-pound, 12-ounce bass caught in the fallen tree of Prairie Creek in 1959.

Fishing in Florida in the 1950s was otherworldly. You could hook a 10-pound bass or a bluegill, (which we called bream), the size of a salad plate. Crappie, (we called them speckled perch), were abundant in Newnan's Lake and weighed up to 3 pounds.

When I returned to the lake in 1992, there hadn't been a crappie landed in 10 years. The bass fishing had declined terribly, though there were still plenty of bluegills. Hybrid "sunshine" bass had been introduced with spotty results.

I went back to Newnan's Lake, too, and it had changed quite a bit. The gators had taken over some of the best fishing spots, and the lake seemed a lot muddier than I remembered, A few years before I left Gainesville, they tried to kill the gizzard shad that were so plentiful. The entire lakeshore was lined with dead fish of all kinds. I sometimes wonder if that was the beginning of the lake's downfall. If they had let Mother Nature handle it, it might have been a lot different.

In 1959, however, the waters teemed with fish. Bass in the 8- to 10-pound range were common. By the time I was 9 years old, I had already caught a 6-pounder, and some of the fish my father landed make today's bass fishing seem dim by comparison.

My father was often the talk of the neighborhood as he brought home huge bass. Boats routinely followed him to see where he was fishing. He was one of the first anglers to use plastic worms. The biggest bass he ever caught (more than 10 pounds) was caught on a Sputterbug topwater lure with a long skirt and a clunky metal spinner in front.

Back then, there weren't depth finders; anglers didn't carry multiple rods rigged with every imaginable bait. No one used GPS, scent oils hadn't come along, and crankbaits had not evolved into the sleek variety offered today. Fishing was pretty much slinging a crude lure with a Mitchell 300 or a Zebco 33 and relying on experience, instinct and luck. There were no endorsements or million-dollar prizes, just local bragging rights and cornmeal-breaded fillets frying in a cast iron skillet.

I don't remember seeing other bass fishermen on Prairie Creek. I guess they reasoned the creek was too small to produce big fish. That seems strange, because I caught several fish that weighed more than 5 pounds. Since I didn't know any better, I fished it anyway.

Many fishing techniques used today originated in the 50s. Take flipping, for instance. This technique involves dropping a lure into heavy cover and then dragging the fish out with a sturdy rod and strong line. Something similar existed in 1959, only it was called "dabbling."

First, you had to get a long – at least 10-foot – bamboo pole and rig it with a section of heavy line, usually longer than 3 or 4 feet. A lure, often some kind of plastic worm or pork rind, was tied to the end of the line.

Florida Photographic Collection

Prairie Creek in the 1950s was a pristine blackwater stream.

To dabble, you went from spot to spot in the weeds or lily pads, dropping the lure into one hole after another. When a fish struck, you pulled it out of the cover by force. Sometimes it was the only way to get to a big fish.

As for dabbling, the line was rigged pretty much the same way but was tied about 5 inches from the end of the pole and only about 8 inches were left free. The end of the pole was used to jiggle up and down on the water, around cover such as grass, lily pads or cypress trees. The noise it made is similar to some of the modern topwater spinner baits.

When a fish hit, it was always a savage strike. The fish had to be horsed in as quickly as possible. Imagine the excitement of getting strikes only a few feet away from the boat.

It took two people to jigger-fish from a boat. One had to paddle, the other had to fish. The big cane pole quickly became heavy, so we swapped places frequently. This type of fishing was especially good just before and after dark. I guess that was one of the reasons only a few people tried it.

One overcast day around dusk, my brother and I were ranging up and down Prairie Creek, fishing for bream and throwing rocks in the water when we got bored. We had just walked up behind our father when he issued the anguished cry of an angler who had lost the big one.

Our father pointed to the fingers of a fallen tree in the water. A big bass was down inside the branches where it had fallen after breaking the line in a matter of seconds. I don't recall if my father tried again that day, but he would come back for that bass again and again.

The next time we visited Prairie Creek, my father headed straight for that fishing spot. Another fisherman was there and the big bass had broken his line. My father didn't bother trying for the fish that day though it was obvious that he was not happy about another angler horning in on his spot.

That fish belonged to my father. In spite of the fact he had landed many largemouths well over 8 pounds, this fish presented

a special challenge to him. After one more failed attempt with a conventional rig, it was time to break out the "jigger pole."

It was with a sense of curiosity that I watched my father rigging the pole much like he would rig our cane poles that we used for catching bream.

The first time around, he rigged it with doubled 10-pound test line. He wrapped the line around the end of the pole and then ran a small section down to the next knot in the bamboo. This was the safety valve. If the top of the pole snapped, the line would still be tied to the section below.

Even though I had fished with a cane pole many times, this oversized rig looked odd, almost comic. There was nothing comic about my father's determination.

On our next Prairie Creek outing, my brother and I followed our father to the fallen tree. We weren't interested in fishing – the drama at hand was much more exciting. As soon as our father dropped the plastic worm into the branches, the bass attacked. Father held sway for a few seconds but then the lunker was gone. The doubled line had snapped.

I only remember hooking and losing the fish twice. One time it broke my line and another time it got off while I was trying to pull it over a log that was 8 or 9 feet out in the water.

I can't remember exactly what my father said, but he didn't get angry. He went back to the drawing board and, in his next attempt, tried wire leader designed for saltwater fishing. The big bass didn't have any problem snapping the wire.

By now, I began to think my father would never get the monster bass out of the tree. It wasn't that I had lost faith in his angling abilities, I just figured if this bass could snap wire leader, then there was a little hope that any line could stand up to it.

On the final try, my father rigged the pole with 30-pound monofilament he braided into triple strength. When we hit Prairie Creek, the sun was bright on the dark water. My younger brother stayed with him, but I didn't want to see my father humiliated again by this monster. I was more interested in seeing what I could scare up myself.

As my father went for the fallen tree, I chased down a green grasshopper and put it on the end of my hook. I dropped the grasshopper next to a cypress knee. In a couple of seconds, I pulled up a bream that was bigger than my hand. I was about to call out, when I heard yelling from the other side of the creek.

I glanced upstream to see my father backing away from the creek with his jigger pole parallel to the ground. The giant bass thrashed the water as my father pulled it from the tree. At that moment, I regretted not going with my father and brother.

The day I used the jigger pole, I had to wade into the water to position the worm where the bass usually stayed. I had about four feet of free line. The fish didn't hit right away and my spirits sank. It seemed like an eternity, but I just kept dangling and working the worm.

I guess the fish finally got tired of seeing the worm dancing around in his territory and decided to kill it. It was a vicious strike!

When it hit, I just backed up and pulled. There was no "playing" this one. The fish was not so spectacular but the whole episode made it different from any other catch. We stopped on the way home at a country store to weigh it. I wrote on the picture that it was 9 pounds, 12 ounces.

My father was holding the bass when I got there. He had the satisfied look of a successful angler, not smug but exuberant. My younger brother was wide-eyed, not quite sure what to say.

A kid a few years older than me came up to us, looked at the fish and said, "That's a big one. You should have it mounted."

My father replied. "The only place we're mounting this one is on the dinner table."

Today, a fish that size would automatically be released, but back then people kept and ate what they caught. We didn't fish anymore that day.

After a 9-pound bass, what's the point? All three of us felt a sense of accomplishment and relief. We took the bass home, cleaned it and my mother fried it for supper. The sight of a huge largemouth riled up the neighborhood again. Those who didn't fish were simply awed, the anglers among them were jealous.

By the time my father caught the big bass, I was accustomed to him bringing home monster fish; but this one was special. My father's determination and ingenuity persevered through the times he had been disappointed and defeated.

When I returned to Prairie Creek some thirty years later, the section where he had caught the big fish was fenced off. It was now private property. I couldn't go up the bank and drop a grasshopper next to a cypress knee. But I really didn't want to. There was no reason to try to relive the past. Prairie Creek was pretty much gone, at least the way I remembered it.

In the spring, after some hard rains, Prairie Creek would become higher, the current swifter. When that happened, you could stand on the bank in one spot and cast out something like a shyster (early spinner bait) and catch just about anything, like gar, mudfish (bowfin), bass or bream. That didn't work when the creek was in its naturally slow and low condition. I have a lot of good memories about the times we had fishing together on Prairie Creek. We sure had a lot of fun. FW

Slip away for a Forgotten Coast eco-adventure

By Capt. Alex Crawford

Many areas of the Sunshine State boast of "unique" estuaries and pristine ecosystems. But if you are interested in taking a truly extraordinary eco-adventure, consider the Forgotten Coast.

Image provided by VISIT FLORIDA

Outdoor adventures abound along the Forgotten Coast, from camping, hiking and biking to wildlife watching, fishing and swimming in the surf.

It's a showcase of unsurpassed natural beauty and amazing communities of animal and plant life, living in perfect harmony with their environments.

The charming seaport town of Apalachicola is the perfect base of operations for your trip planning. From the world-class beaches of Cape San Blas on the west to the St. Marks River on the east, the Forgotten Coast is a water wonderland with offerings to suit the most seasoned adventurers. Opportunities abound to soak in the warm sunshine and immerse your body and soul in a completely gorgeous water playground. Folks who have been fortunate enough to experience this personal nirvana all say the same thing – it is one of the most naturally beautiful and peaceful places on the planet.

Outdoor aficionados are drawn to the unspoiled, watery landscapes. Options are limitless for thrilling flora and fauna adventures. You can be as physically involved or laid back as you wish by choosing activities that suit you and your fellow travelers' interests. Try a bit of everything, from a private picnic lunch on a remote sugar-white sand beach to a paddling trip up one of the many undisturbed blackwater rivers. Late spring and early summer are the times to plan your adventures, from camping, cycling, fishing and hiking to birding, gator watching and manatee sightings. Few places on earth offer so many opportunities for outdoor adventures.

Whether young or simply young at heart, the Apalachicola Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve is a "must see." It offers interesting educational exhibits and aquariums. It is a good "starter" excursion that will help you decide what other adventures your family may want to try during your trip.

Several fishing guides offer eco-experiences in addition to inshore and offshore fishing charters. Talk to other visitors who have used a particular guide, to help you find one to make your experience educational and fun. Specifically, ask about safety equipment, and confirm the rate and payment options in advance. As a rule of thumb, the larger the charter vessel, the higher the rates.

Many visitors bring their own boats, canoes or kayaks while others rent them. Many of

the most-fun adventures require a boat. Just be sure you feel comfortable tackling a trip on your own.

For those who prefer guided trips, there are guide services that enable visitors to join a trip with others and reduce the expenses. Half-day eco-trips (five hours) for six people run about $300 to $400. Most guide services publish their rates on their individual Web sites.

Some of the best "do-it-yourself" trips include visits to local national wildlife refuges. One particular site you will enjoy is the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge on the east end of the Forgotten Coast. This special place rests in unspoiled natural beauty, simply awaiting your exploration.

A highlight of any visit to the refuge is the St. Marks lighthouse, one of the most photogenic lighthouses along the northern Gulf of Mexico. It is a stately old lighthouse with an amazing history, especially regarding the War Between the States (known by folks up north as the Civil War). Be sure to take your digital camera on this trip.

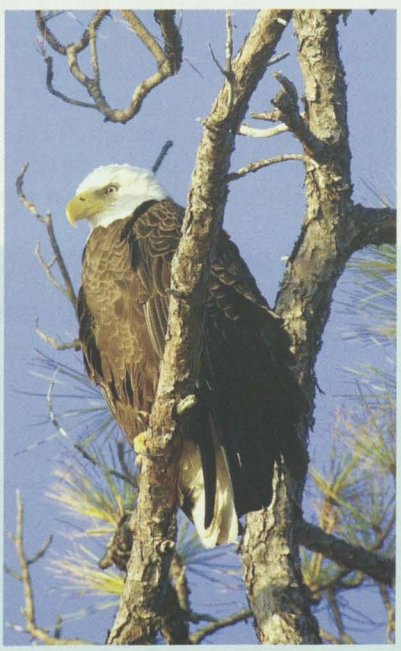
Speaking of photography, the Forgotten Coast is a spectacular birding paradise. Photo opportunities are virtually everywhere. In spring, this area of north Florida is the first stop for dozens of bird species migrating from Central and South America. If you look at a chart of the Gulf of Mexico, you can easily see that the Panhandle is the first landfall for birds flying hundreds of miles north.

During my years of offshore fishing, it has been quite common for a few songbirds to set down on my boat to rest their tired wings. We always give them fresh water before they leave to complete their long journey. In early May, we start to see the first hummingbirds hovering around the yard flowers. These little birds are some of the most colorful in nature. They are a welcome sight and offer great photo opportunities.

Other beautiful feathered creatures calling the Forgotten Coast home include eagles and ospreys. Their presence reassures us the habitat is healthy and thriving. Egrets, herons, pelicans, terns, gulls, oyster catchers and owls also show up in the area. Be sure to bring good binoculars.

The Forgotten Coast offers visitors spectacular natural beauty, unlimited eco-adventures and friendly folks who will welcome you with open arms. You'll feel right at home. Enjoy this special place and take home some great family memories. Come practice the art of vacation-easy. FW

William J. Weber



Debbie Hooper

Above: A highlight of any trip to the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is the St. Marks lighthouse. **Right:** The Forgotten Coast is a birder's paradise and provides outstanding photo opportunities, such as this American bald eagle.

Forgotten Coast Resources

The Apalachicola Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve is in Apalachicola on the north end of Market Street. The facility is open 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, and its phone number is (850) 653-8063.

For a list of qualified charter guides that offer eco-trips, contact the Apalachicola Chamber of Commerce at (850) 653-9419, the Carrabelle Chamber at 697-2585 or Gulf County at 227-1223.

You may want to visit their Web sites and learn about the communities and local activities they offer.

For fishing info, try the Florida Coastal Conservation Association or the Florida Guides Association on the Web.

Generations

My kind of guy

One man teaches his kids catch-and-release by example

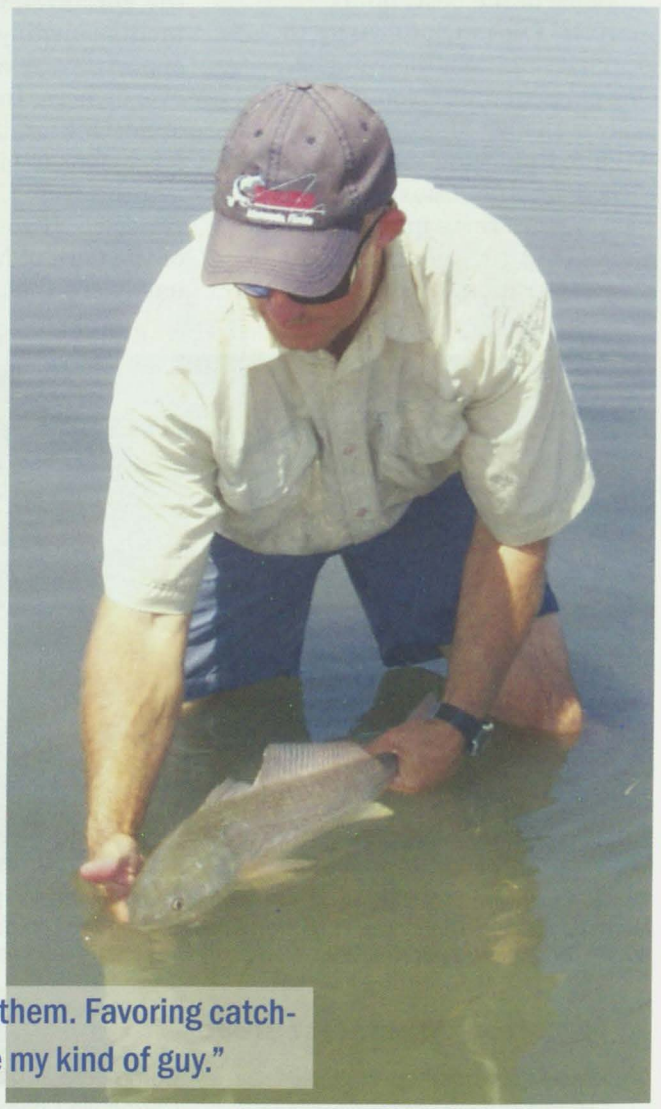
Article and photographs by Capt. Ron Presley

It began like a normal ordinary fishing trip. A trip I had taken hundreds of times before. An early morning crew included a father, Bob, and his two young sons, Bobby and Riley. The family had traveled to Cocoa and Lee Wenner Park to enjoy a half-day fishing trip on the Indian River Lagoon.

My Pathfinder cruised smoothly eastbound along the bridge, greeted by a beautiful Space Coast sunrise and all the promise of a new and exciting day. The water was perfectly smooth, although dirtied by recent Hurricane Wilma. It was one of those days that, as a fishing guide, you sometimes dread because the previous day's fishing had been so tough. I should say the "catching" had been tough because the fishing is always good.

As we journey northward, I discovered Bob was an experienced angler, enjoying mostly offshore fishing. We discussed our favorite lures and how we preferred to use them. Our conversation took place while Riley sat on a cooler in front of the center console, being buffeted by cool morning air without complaint. Bobby sat on the leaning seat of the Pathfinder with Bob standing behind him, protectively cradling the boy in his arms. Earlier, Bobby told me he did not like to go too fast and did not like to turn fast.

During the morning's adventure, Bob and the kids enjoyed catching ladyfish with both artificial and live bait. Bobby caught a really nice pompano and we took a couple of pictures of Bobby's catch and released the pompano without harm.



Bob said he did not enjoy eating fish, just catching them. Favoring catch-and-release myself I responded by saying, "You are my kind of guy."

We then moved to a shallow-water flat where I had previously caught redfish. I set the Power Pole anchor and allowed the boat to position itself in the light easterly wind. Everyone baited up with ladyfish and settled in for a little "lazy fishing" with cut bait. It was a perfect time to relax and enjoy a little lunch in the warm Florida sunshine.

I explained to the crew that sometimes this type of fishing pays off if you are patient and allow the scent from the ladyfish to fill the surrounding flat with its irresistible, to the redfish that is, smell. Fish actually travel some distance to find delectable chunks of ladyfish.

All were patient, including the kids. Finally, Bobby's pole bent over, indicating a decent strike. Bob was closest and picked up the rod and handed it to Bobby. The circle hook attached to the 20-pound fluorocarbon leader did its job. Bobby fought the fish

for quite a while, pumping and reeling down to gain some line and bring what appeared to be a 24-inch redfish along side the boat.

Bob readied the net as the fish neared the boat. Then before we knew it, the feisty fish changed directions, ran around the bow, and cut the line on the trolling motor, suspended from the deck.

Everyone was disappointed at loosing the first redfish of the day, but encouraged by the fact that we had hooked one. Since we'd removed the other rods from the water while Bobby fought his fish, we quickly got everything baited up and back into the shallow water of the Indian River Lagoon.

Soon, Bob caught and boated a nice lower slot-sized red, renewing our confidence that there were more around. Just as with the pompano, we performed fish CPR on the redfish and went on about our fishing.

Then, Bob's rod bent over once more. He picked it up and handed it to Riley so he could experience the fun of landing a fish. That redfish didn't give up, and Riley had quite a fight on his hands. Riley would gain some line and the beefy red would take some out. Eventually, he managed to bring the redfish to the waiting net handled skillfully by his dad.

This time the circle hood did not do its job as it had before. The hook was not in the crushers, but deep in the throat, and required pliers to remove. We took our pictures and Bob held the weary fish gently over the side and worked it back and forth, forcing water and oxygen through the gills. While Bob was conducting CPR with both boys looking on, I prepared the rods for the next round of fishing.

Then I heard Bob say, "Don't roll over on me."

I turned around to see shoes and socks lying on the deck. Bob was in the water retrieving the redfish that had rolled over and lay still on the grassy bottom. Once again, he worked to resuscitate the weakened redfish.

Success! The fish regained its strength and swam swiftly and strongly from Bob's gentle grasp.

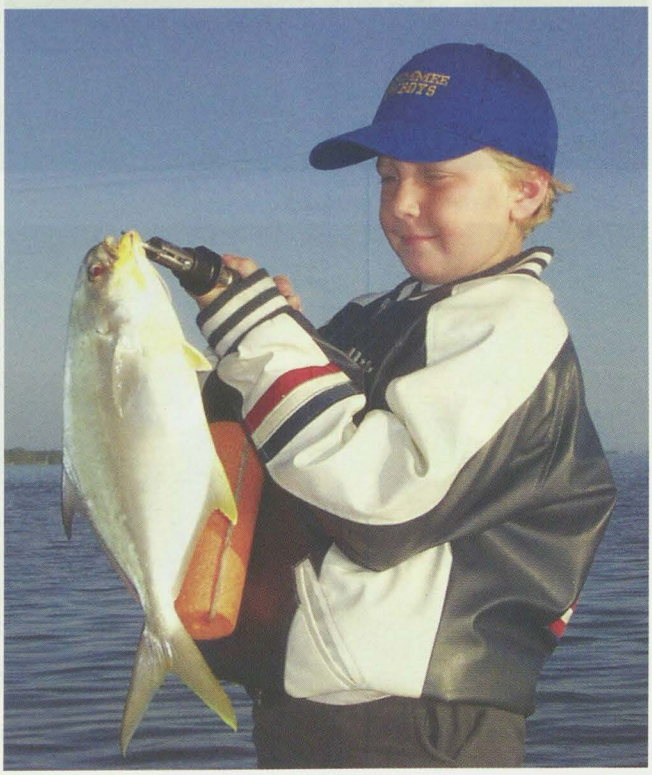
"Bob," I said, "You are my kind of guy."

There was no hesitation on Bob's part. "I didn't come here to kill em," he said. "I just enjoy catching them. If we don't take care of them now we can't catch them again later."

We didn't catch anymore fish that day, but I knew I had met a man who cares for the lagoon and the experience it brings us as much as anyone I know. That day's experience presents a challenge to all anglers who love the outdoors. The challenge is presented not in words, but deeds, by the actions that were amply demonstrated by one man on a simple fishing trip. Take the challenge and pass the passion on to your children and friends as he works to do with his.

As my Pathfinder turned and headed slowly west through the manatee zone and toward the channel that would carry us back to the distant boat ramp, Bobby queried the crew, "When can we go fast?" FW

Capt. Ron may be reached at Inshore Fishing Adventures by calling (321) 454-7285 or e-mailing presleyr@bellsouth.net or visit his Web site at www.inshorefishingadventures.com.



Above: Riley holds the hard-fighting redfish on his lap before it was released. **Below:** Bobby proudly holds up the pompano he caught during the fishing trip. **Previous page:** Their father, Bob, works to revive Riley's slot-sized redfish.

Wildlife **Watch**

Johnny Villaronga

Thomas J. Dunkerton

Johnny Villaronga

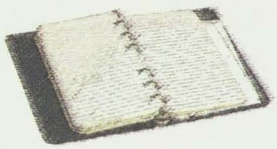
Top to bottom: Hatchling alligator stands on its mother; blue-winged teal; young raccoon.

July

- Swallow-tailed and Mississippi kites, purple martins and tree swallows gather to migrate south for the winter
- Bear breeding season begins
- Scrub morning-glory and butterfly weed bloom in July
- Buck deer in velvet may occasionally be spotted
- Sea oats flower on Atlantic beaches
- Second litters of gray squirrels are born
- Young crocodiles hatch in south Florida
- Baby raccoons, foxes, armadillos and bobcats leave their mothers
- Listen for Eastern narrowmouth toads "waaa" like a baying sheep after heavy rains
- Leatherback, loggerhead and green sea turtles continue to crawl ashore to lay eggs
- Look for magnificent frigatebirds flying overhead in south Florida

August

- Short-tailed shrews begin the year's second round of breeding
- Gopher tortoises hatch
- Shorebirds and blue-winged teal arrive to winter on Florida wetlands and lakes
- Indigo snakes and other snake eggs hatch
- Yellow warbler migration begins
- Alligators hatch out now until mid-September
- Deer breed in southern Florida
- Coral along the coast spawn in conjunction with the full moon
- Bass forage in shallows in late evening, early morning and nighttime
- Leatherback turtles depart for their oceanic foraging grounds
- Wild hog breeding season begins



Calendar

July

July: Florida Recreation and Parks Month. www.floridastateparks.org.
July 1: FWC began operation in July '99.
July 1-July 2: Flats Slam Event of the Key West Fishing Tournament Series. Key West; 305-295-6601.
July 4: Old-fashioned 4th of July Picnic. Barnacle Historic State Park; 3485 Main Highway; Coconut Grove; (305) 442-6866; www.floridastateparks.org.
July 7-9: Ancient City Game Fish Association's Kingfish Challenge. St. Augustine; (904) 824-6436; www.acgfa.com.
July 8-9: "Kick Back in the Keys" Key Largo; (954) 475- 9068; www.ladiesletsgofishing.com.
July 9-12: Rolex/IGFA Inshore Championship Tournament. Islamorada; (954) 927-2628; www.igfa.org.
July 14-15: Indian River Area Fishing Report Offshore "Bluewater Brawl" Sebastian; (772) 633-8800; www.irafr.com.
July 14-15: Catch A Cure Fishing Tournament. Sarasota; (941) 929-0621.
July 14-15: Geiger Key Dolphin Daze Tournament. Big Pine; (305) 296-3553.
July 14-16: Canaveral Mac Attack. Port Canaveral; (321) 799-3876; www.canaveralmacattack.com.
July 17: Landscape the Florida-friendly Way. Orange Park; (904) 269-6355; www.claychamber.com.
July 17-22: BellSouth Greater Jacksonville Kingfish Tournament. (904) 251-3011; www.kingfishtournament.com.
July 19-22: Drambuie Key West Marlin Tournament. Key West; (305) 292-2710; www.keywestmarlin.com.
July 21-22: The Back Country Classic. Naples; (239) 671-9347; www.caloosacatchandrelease.com.
July 22: IFA Redfish Tour. New Smyrna Beach; (478) 788-8871; www.redfishtour.com.
July 27-28: CCA Florida Inter-Chapter Challenge. River Palm Cottages and Fish Camp; Jensen Beach; (941) 531-4019; www.ccaflorida.org.

August

Aug. 2-4: West Palm Beach Kids' Fishing Day. Lantana; (850) 488-6058; MyFWC.com.
Aug. 4-6: Cape Inshore Redfish Challenge. Cape Coral; (239) 573-3121; www.capecoral.net.
Aug. 5: A Day in Florida History. DeLeon Springs State Park; (386) 985-4212; www.floridastateparks.org.
Aug. 5: Mercury/SeaVee Pompano Beach Saltwater Showdown. (954) 725-4010; www.bluewatermovements.com.
Aug. 11-13: Hot Summer Boat Show. Orlando; (407) 466-2996; www.boatshowflorida.com.
Aug. 11-13: Clear The Decks Boat Show. Prime F. Osborn Convention Center; Jacksonville; (904) 724-3003.
Aug. 12: National Marina Day. www.marinaassociation.org.
Aug. 12-19: Emerald Coast Boat Week. Destin; (850) 243-3800; www.emeraldcoastpokerrun.com.
Aug. 15-17: Little Palm Island Grand Slam. Little Torch Key; (305) 664-2002.
Aug. 18-20: Ladies, Let's Go Fishing! Sarasota; (954) 475- 9068; www.ladiesletsgofishing.com.
Aug. 26: Mexico Beach Artificial Reef Association King Mackerel Tournament. (850) 723-2546; mbcdc@mexicobeach.com.
Aug. 31: Silver Springs and the Florida Aquifer. Silver River State Park; (352) 236-5401; www.floridastateparks.org.

September

Sept. 2: Port St. Joe Scallop Festival. Port St. Joe; (850) 227-1223.
Sept. 7-10: Daytona Beach Fall Boat Show. Daytona Beach Ocean Center; (800) 693-6423.
Sept. 9: Kid's Fishing Clinic; Martin County; (850) 488-6058; MyFWC.com.
Sept. 8-10: Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshop. Ocala; (561) 625-5126; MyFWC.com/huntered/becoming_an_outdoors_woman.htm.
Sept. 16: International Coastal Cleanup Day. www.coastalcleanup.org.
Sept. 16: Coastal Cleanup. St. Andrews State Park; Panama City; (850) 233-5140; www.floridastateparks.org.
Sept. 16: Coastal Clean-up Day at St. Marks Wildlife Refuge. St. Marks; (850) 925-6121.
Sept. 16: Marion County Springs Festival. Silver River State Park; (352) 236-5401; www.springsfest.org.
Sept. 16: Florida Sportsman Show. South Florida Fairgrounds; West Palm Beach; (772) 219-7400; floridasportsman.com/shows.
Sept. 22-23: Summer Slam Flats Tournament; South Seas Island Resort; Captiva Island; (239) 671-9347; www.caloosacatchandrelease.com.
Sept. 23: C-Quarter's Marina King Fish Shoot Out. Carrabelle; (850) 697-8400.
Sept. 23-25: RedSnook Charity Catch and Release Fishing Tournament. Naples; www.theredsnook.com.
Sept. 23-27: States Organization for Boating Access Conference "Charting Boat Access in Florida." Tampa; www.sobaus.org.
Sept. 30: National Public Lands Day. www.publiclandsday.org.
Sept. 30-Oct. 1: Florida Sportsman Show. Florida State Fairgrounds; Tampa; (772) 219-7400; floridasportsman.com/shows.

E-mail your event listing six months in advance to: FloridaWildlife@MyFWC.com.

Fishing and hunting seasons

Apr.1-Aug. 5: Lobster Closed Season.
May 1-Aug. 31: Snook Closed Season in the Gulf, Everglades National Park & Monroe County.
May 16-Oct. 14: Stone Crab Closed Season.
June-August: Oyster Closed Season in Dixie, Wakulla and Levy counties.
July 1-Oct. 31: Blue Land Crab Closed Season.

For additional information on hunting and fishing seasons, visit MyFWC.com.

True **Tales**

I've been stumped

By Barry P. Tuveson Illustration by John Papesca

Have you ever been stumped? I don't mean have you ever had a problem you couldn't solve. I mean have you ever been river stumped.

Years ago, on the Wakulla River just outside Tallahassee, I was stumped good. I was with a group of friends with their boats, at a dock next to a boat ramp on the narrow river. A man and his 13-year-old son drove up and launched their 15-foot, single-hulled, plywood boat. They said they had built the vessel and had put the final coat of paint on it the previous day. Some of us helped with the launch and were careful not to scrape or mar it in any way.

They had come to ski and asked whether there was room at the bend to make a turn pulling a skier.

"If the boy stays behind the boat, he can ski to the first bend," I counseled. "Then slow down, let the skier sink into the water, make a gentle turn and then pull him back up for the return trip."

It was sage advice and it worked without incident.

Eventually, the father and son returned to the dock to take a break. It wasn't long, however, before the son began pestering the dad to pull him again.

The dad asked, "Will you take my boat and pull him for a while?"

There was an audible gasp from my friends. Only their loyalty to me kept them from telling the dad they didn't allow me to drive their boats. In fact, some of them wouldn't even allow me to ride in their boats.

"I'll be glad to," I said. "I like to drive different boats."

We took the boat a short ride up the river, and I pointed out an open area where I planned to turn around and explained I would maneuver the boat so he could swing out a little, and we would be able to make the turn without lowering him into the water.

"Won't that be fun?" I grinned.

I knew the river well and knew every stump that was near the banks. Most stumps are not aggressive by nature. But they do have something in common with snakes. They don't take kindly to invasions of their territory. Unlike snakes, though, stumps don't give you a warning. If you get too close to a stump when you're just drifting along, it may do nothing more than just gently push you aside. But if you approach them in a hurry and surprise them, they will get you if they can. That's what happened to me.

I pulled the boy to the turn-around point and indicated that he should swing out for the turn. I skirted the edge of the bank, but carefully respected the hidden stump's personal space.

What happened next was not the boy's fault – even though it really was. He dug in his ski a bit too much during the turn, which jerked the lightweight boat slightly off course. "Slightly" was enough to anger the stump, and it reached out and grabbed me. I felt the strike, but it felt more like a warning.

Within seconds, I felt water around my feet. The bow began to rise, and the stern lowered as the boat filled with water. I assessed the situation in a heartbeat and motioned to the kid to drop off. He didn't want to but saw the desperation on my face and let go. The densely wooded banks didn't offer a place to run ashore, so I kept going. By the time I reached the ramp, the bow was pointing skyward, and the stern was threatening to go under. I headed for the grassy area next to the ramp.

I ran the boat aground as the dad and several others jumped into the water to lift the stern to keep the engine from going under. Meanwhile, a couple of guys jumped into another boat and ran downriver to rescue the son.

The dad was very nice about the incident and didn't say a word to me. We drained the boat and loaded it onto the trailer, and the dad and son left. It was time anyway. The dad had been in the sun too long and his face was beet red. FW

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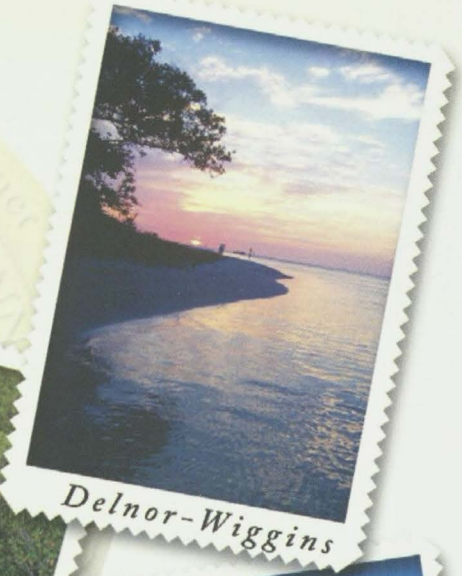
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